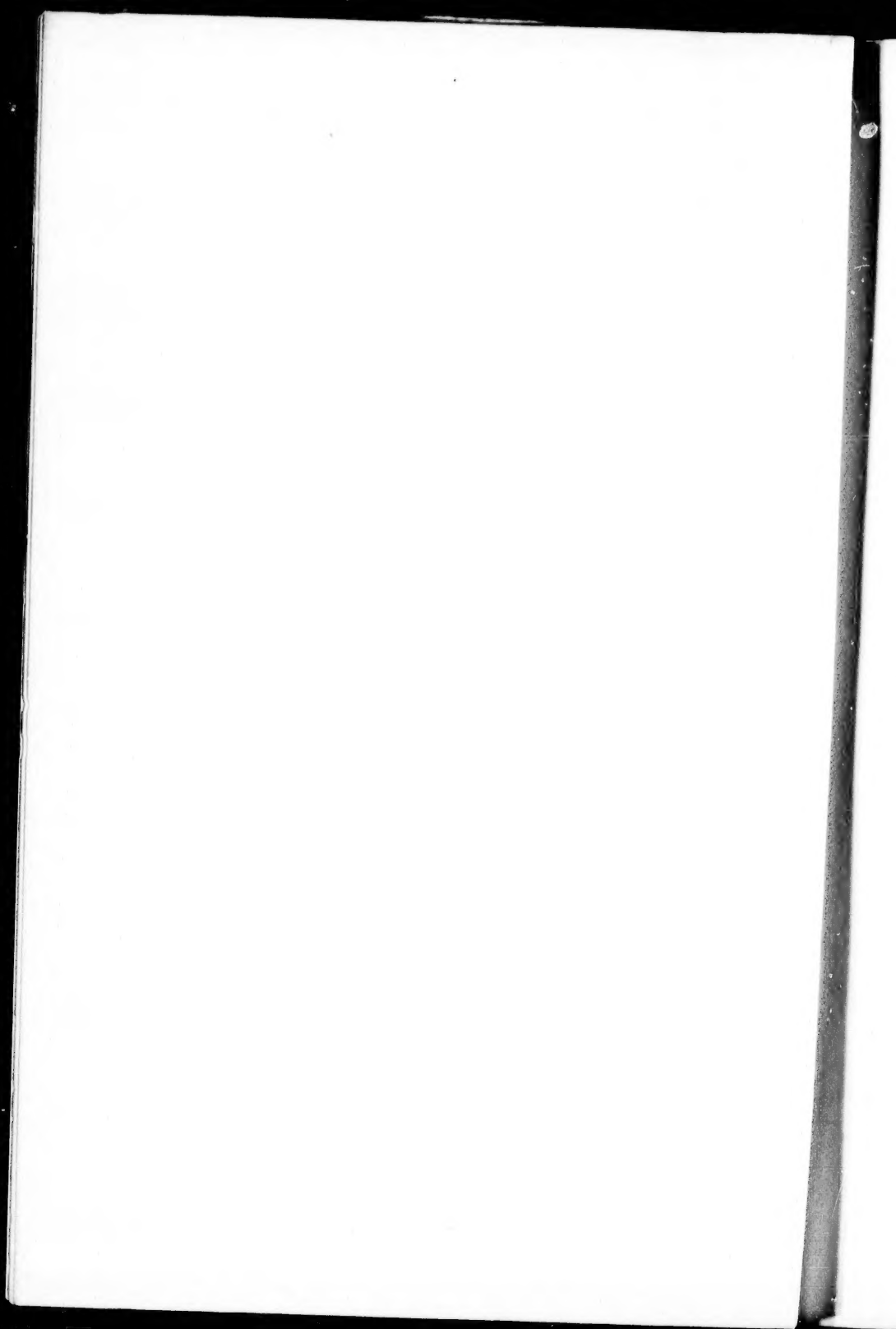


'POSTLE FARM



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BY

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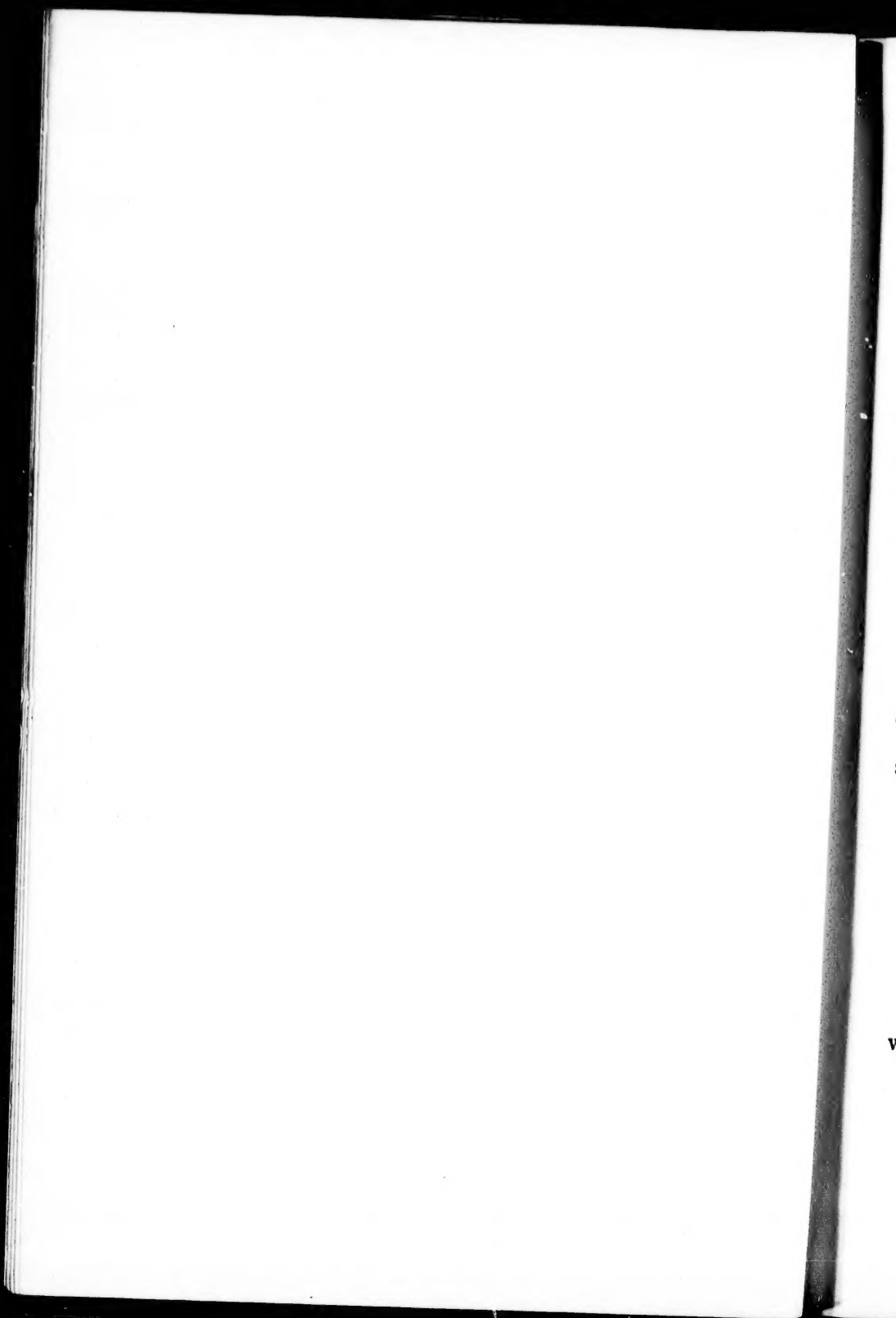
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*THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED.*



'POSTLE FARM.



PROLOGUE.

TWO men stood together in the dark. The trees surged to and fro in the wailing autumn wind.

"Will you do this? Yes or no?"

"Oh sir! 'tis a cruel thing for ask!"

"Will you do it? Yes or no?"

"Please, sir, give me time for think!"

"There is no time to give. Yes or no?"

"I've always loved 'ee, sir! But ain't there no way out of it?"

"None. I am in extremity? I want your help."

Then the other man trembled exceedingly.

"You shall have it, sir," he said at last. "I'll do it!"

A week later, a man hurried through the dark night with a burden in his arms.

He reached the river. Unmooring a boat, he rowed out into the stream. Half an hour later he came back

This time he carried no burden.

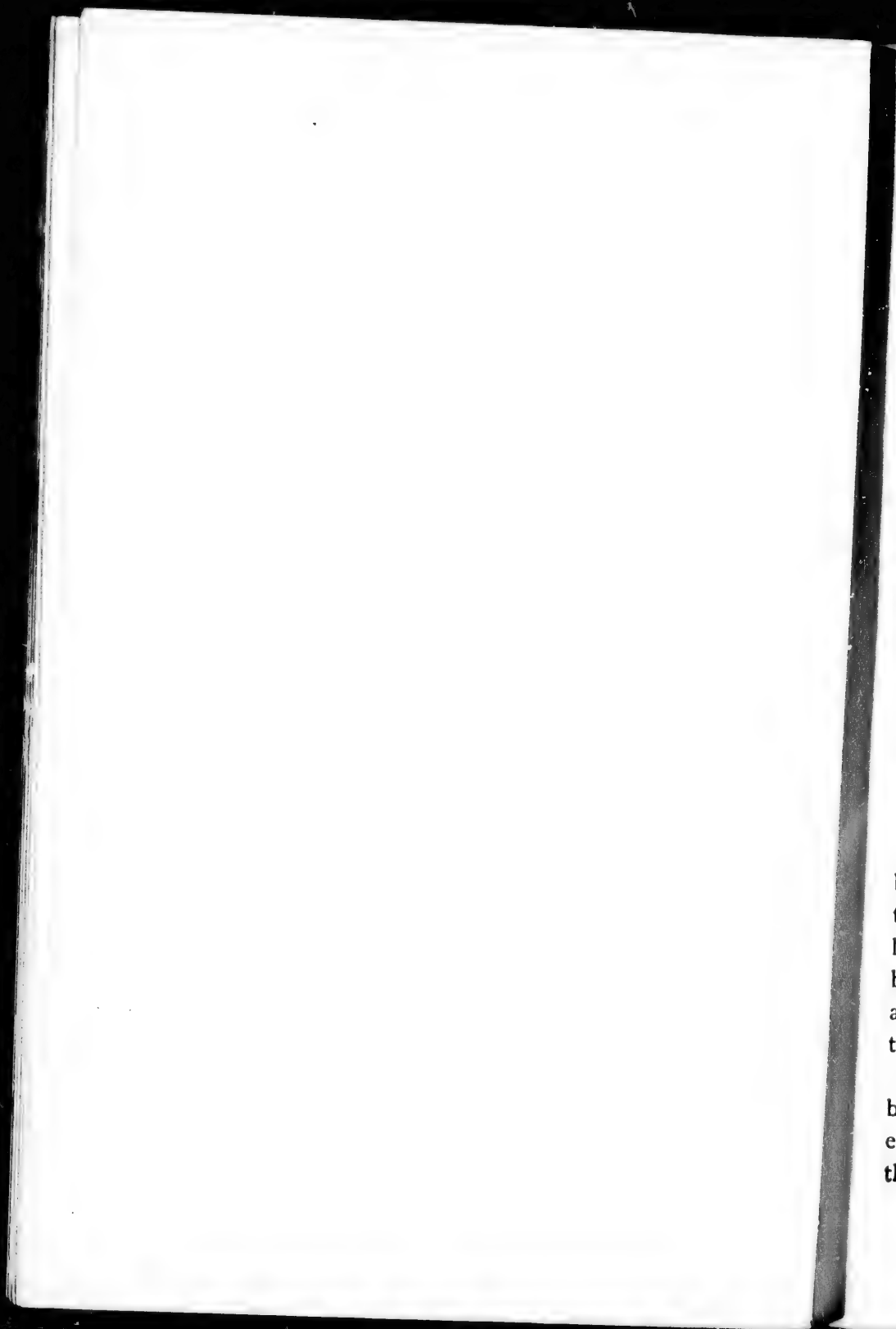
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BOOK I.

THE DARKEST HOUR



CHAPTER I.

'POSTLE FARM had gained its name, generations back, from the row of elm-trees that shadowed its thatched buildings. There were twelve of these elms, and in the neighbourhood they went by the name of the "Twelve Apostles."

When the walls of the farm were reared under their shelter, the place was called "Apostle Farm"; and later the *A* was dropped, and "Postle Farm" was its name, and few people knew or cared about its origin.

These old time-honoured elms had stood the blast of many a winter wind, and blossomed when the springtime came, and spread out their green leaves to shelter the mating rooks. Some of the branches had grown and spread till they formed a second roof over the thatch one that sheltered the main building.

There was something, on the whole, a wee bit bleak and forbidding in the place—though homely enough, doubtless, to any but Devonians. But to them it had a scant look, the fields being divided

by low stone walls instead of luxuriant hedges. The land lay on either side of a ridge of hills, along the steep sides of which even the constant rains of Devon could find no resting-place. Consequently, neither was there luxuriance of growth; but the short grey grass was sweet, and sheep thrived and fattened on it, and footrot was never known among the flocks.

Very healthy it was, for man and beast, with the tidal river washing the western side of the ridge, bringing up the salt sea-breezes twice a-day, and the whiff of the brown seaweed. The grey walls of the farm were weather-beaten and bare. Not a creeper covered them: even the clinging ivy had forborne to turn to them for support. The old house stood like a Spartan chief, scorning home ties, ready only to bear the brunt of the storm, and unimpressed by the wreathing sunlight.

Some houses seem alive. They speak, they smile: they tell of love, and breathe of hope, and sing of happy lives within. Others neither speak nor smile: they are dumb. With finger on mouth, and cold eyes that will not see, and ears that will not hear, they raise their walls of impenetrable silence. And one tries to picture their inner life; smiling faces, joyous voices, happy laughter. But no; one's mind returns unto one void.

Does one live there? Does any one laugh and sing there?

So with 'Postle Farm.

It was Sunday afternoon. Not a creature moved about. A stranger wandering round might have supposed the plague had stricken the dwellers within, the cattle without, and not one remained.

The sky was deep blue. The wood on the side of the hill was beginning to tremble with the first faint green of the larch. Here and there a patch of gorse blazed. High overhead the song of larks. At one's feet a myriad daisies.

Then suddenly over the brow of the hill came two children, skipping hand in hand. One was fair, with the dazzling pink-and-white complexion for which the county is famous. A pretty child: the child for whom one searches in one's pocket for stray halfpence. The other had tawny locks growing in wild disorder, and brown eyes that flashed sunlight, like a limpid stream where the waters are deep.

Hand in hand they came, and as they came they sang—

"There is an o' water-witch,
And an evil eye has she!
She lives on grasses that grow in the ditch,
And trips up children from school that mitch;
And that does she! and that does she!
An' mun calls her the Witch o' Fammelsee!"

Light and blithe of heart were they. If it rained, or the sun shone, it made no difference to them. Like the lilies, they toiled not, neither did they spin.

There was no occasion for them to take thought for the morrow ; the morrow took thought for itself.

“ ‘There is an ol’ water-witch——’

How does’n go on?” asked Cathie, shaking back her thick hair.

“Oh! don’t ’ee know? They took an’ sticked a bullock’s heart o’ pins, an’ ’er died!”

“Us won’t ’ave that. Us’ll ’ave ’er was a-made a fine lady, wi’ dresses to clothey ’ersel’, an’ money, an’ servants for fend for her!”

“But that ain’t the rights o’ it!” objected the matter-of-fact Bessie.

“Never mind the rights o’t. The rights o’t be just what I makk o’t! Us’ll ’ave daisy chains!” She finished suddenly, throwing herself on the grass.

“Do ’ee like heartseases?” inquired Bessie.

“Ees; they be like faces—crowds o’ mun. An’ when the wind blow’th, ’tis like as if they was a-niddin’ an’ a-noddin’ to ’ee!”

“Go ’long! Flowers can’t nid an’ nod to ’ee!”

“Fey they can!”

“You’m always speakin’ up ol’ rummage! They can’t, and I shall ask mother whether mun can or no.”

Cathie bent forward.

“Hark!” she cried, “there’s Grandfer fiddlin’!”

“No ’e ain’t!” said Bessie, whose duller ears the sound did not reach. “You’m always hearin’ what no other folks can’t!”

Catherine started running, and Bessie got up slowly and followed her. She presently caught the sound of fiddling too, and the two children ran into the farmyard together. For a minute or two they could not make out from whence the sound came. Finally, Grandfer was discovered seated behind a water-butt, fiddling away to his heart's content.

The children began to dance. Brown locks and gold locks tossed in the still spring air in time to the movement of their nimble feet; their eyes sparkled, their colour heightened. Grandfer rose from behind the water-butt, still fiddling, and led the way through the farmyard, on to the hillside starred with daisies. And after him the children came dancing.

Then at last he drew his bow with a crash across the strings, and the children threw themselves breathless and laughing on the ground.

Grandfer was a fine-featured blue-eyed old man, somewhat shrunken now, but tall still. He looked at the children as they lay panting on the grass. But his eye rested longer on the taller, darker girl; the fair blue-eyed Bessie was only a neighbour's child. Indeed Cathie drew the eye always, no matter whether you were kith and kin to her or not. She commanded attention like flashes of lightning.

The old man sat down beside the children. The sun was setting now behind the opposite ridge of

hills, leaving a path of ruddy gold across the full bosom of the river. It caught the upper turrets of Upcott Hall standing embowered in trees, and wrapped for the greater part in impenetrable gloom.

Then the sun set, and the grey twilight fell upon the lonely hills like a sigh—half sad, half satisfied. Grandfer rose and turned homewards. Cathie, wearied with her dancing, hung on to his coat-tails, and Bessie limped fretfully behind. She had got a pebble in her shoe, and discarded Cathie's practical advice to "tak'n out an' 'ave done wi' it!"

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CHAPTER II.

"**THE** me-aid dances zame as eef 'er were possessed-like!" said Grandfer, as he sat before the fire smoking his evening pipe. "'Tis amazin' vor zee 'er!"

Near him sat his daughter hushing her child to sleep. She was a sad-eyed delicate-looking woman, with a mass of pale red hair. Opposite sat Miah, his son-in-law, a coarse, large man, with a fair complexion, which the sun and the wind, and large potions of home-brewed ale, had turned to a disagreeable brick-red.

"'Er zeem'th mortal queer, any gait," he answered slowly, taking the pipe from his mouth and spitting copiously on the hearthstone. "Mollard telled me 'e meet 'er up nine o'clock—or zome after—right agin the churchyard, an' the 'ead-stones a-showin' up white, an' 'er makkin' not a bit o' differ'nce—zame's if 'er was i' broad daylight an' the hens a-cacklin', instead o' foggy moonlight an' the owls a-hootin'!"

"Wheer bey 'er now?" inquired Grandfer, turning to his daughter Annie.

"Out an' 'bout," the woman answered wearily ;
"'er won't be kep' in !"

"'Er tak's after Liza, don't 'er ?" inquired Miah.
"'Er was a gad-about, I've yert tell."

He narrowed his eyes disagreeably, and Grandfer moved uneasily.

"Liza was a honest me-aid," he murmured—"a honest me-aid."

He got up presently and reached his hat down from behind the door.

"Where be gwin, vather ?" his daughter asked.

"Vor vind the little me-aid. 'Er didn't ought vor bey a-brooard these time o' night."

The woman sighed.

"'Er will be," she said ; "'er will do as 'er's minded to."

Grandfer went out, and the door slammed heavily to behind him.

There was silence in the kitchen save for the slow creak of the rocking-chair as the sad-eyed woman hushed the child to sleep. Presently she ceased rocking and opened out her arm. The little heavy head fell back ; the tired limbs relaxed. The child was sleeping.

"Us ought for kill the pig this week," said Miah.

The woman did not answer. She stirred the child's curls lightly with her thin fingers.

"Do 'ee 'ear ?"

"I've a - got they spasms so bad again," the woman said faintly.

"You an' yer spasms!" the man answered scornfully.

"Tis 'eavy work liftin' o' the slabs."

"Ye an't got no 'eart to it, that what it be! If it weren't for 'ee," nodding at Grandfer's empty chair, "I'd knock the nonsense out o' 'ee!"

The woman made no answer; not even silent tears welled into her eyes. Her tears lay in a deep frozen well. Kind words might bring them—but only to wash over the surface an instant, and be frozen like the rest.

She sat silent, her eyes wandering from the fire to the child, from the child to the fire. And ever when they came back to the child, a ray of subdued joy shot from them, like pale wintery sunlight through yellow leaves.

He was a picture of a child! Fair curls clustered—now with a healthy dampness—round the temple; long lashes swept the soft pink cheek; the red lips were parted. The mother raised him gently and placed him in the cot. The beautiful, round, white, dimpled limbs sank on to the pillow, and there was not so much as the quiver of an eyelid. The mother's touch had left him sleeping still.

The clock struck nine,—nine long wheezy strokes. Grandfer's step came over the yard, and with it the dancing steps of Cathie, like a peal of merry bells beside a tolling one.

"Go now, ma-deear, tōy bade," he said as they

entered, "an' dun 'ee go vor wander night-times. The pexies 'll 'ave 'ee!"

"I yert mun laughin' as I come over 'ill to-night," she answered.

"Ay, ay, they bey wide wak'. I mind when my güd woman was a-livin' an' I went out dade o' night, they 'emmed me een's 'igher fiel' zo's I cüdd'n get out no ways 'vore I vixed my determination like, an' went over 'idge."

"Bain' 'ee böötiful?" said Cathie, bending over the cradle.

"Catch 'old to 'andle, Cathie, will 'ee," said Annie wearily, "an' 'elp me up over stairs wi' un?"

Panting, and often pausing for breath, the woman led the way, till Cathie suddenly caught the cradle in her strong young arms and ran up the remainder of the stairs alone, looking down from the top and laughing. The lamp Annie carried threw Cathie's face into strong light and heavy shadow, till she might have been a laughing pixie caught fresh from the moorland.

"Oh! my God!" the woman said, with her hand pressed against her side, "what would I give for strength likey that!"

CHAPTER III.

ONE wet cold evening in the early part of April Grandfer took down his fiddle, and calling Cathie, he cried—

“Now I’ll tache ’ee vor viddle.”

She came running, her brown eyes sparkling.

“I played a tune t’other day, didn’t I?” she cried, appealing to her aunt and eagerly taking the bow the old man held out to her.

As one well accustomed to handle the instrument, she tucked it under her chin and balanced the bow as Grandfer had taught her to as soon as she was old enough to hold it steadily.

“Play’n!” the old man said. “Let’s yer’n.”

Standing up before the great fireplace, with the flickering flames now revealing her, now casting tender shadows over her, as if they almost dreaded to reveal her dawning beauty, Cathie drew the bow with a masterly touch across the strings of the instrument.

Then she played.

And Grandfer listened, and Annie swallowed

the lump that rose in her throat, and thought of her girlhood, and the lover that the sea had swallowed, and the golden dream that had melted away long ago, giving place to the hard realities of life.

The old familiar melody rose and fell. It was different playing altogether from Grandfer's. It was all heart, all sobs and sighs, and tears and smiles.

And Grandfer, listening, groaned beneath his breath.

"Loord, what a drop o't 'll döy!" Then, "'Ow döy 'ee döy't, ma-deear? Tes amazin'. Danceth an' play'th zo as never was! Grandfer 'd bes' geeve over viddlin' now. My vingers b'ain't zo lithsome as they was, nether. Age overtak's 'ee, an' laves 'ee no manner o' use—no manner o' use at all!"

Cathie dropped on her knees beside the old man's chair. The flame flashed up and showed tears in her eyes.

"I shan't never touch the ol' fiddle more!" she said. "Sinth 'e mak's 'ee feel bad, I won't never handle un more!"

"God bless 'ee! 'er's that warm-'earted!" the old man said, gazing at her with an expression almost of awe and reverence. "Dear heart! dear heart!" he murmured, "what a cruel wecked contrairy world it bey!"

"Vor why then?" she asked. "Because I can

fiddle? Because I can dance? Play now, Grandfer, an' see me foot it!"

Thus beguiled, the old man took up his fiddle with lingering loving fingers. Content came back to him, and his eyes sparkled as he watched Cathie twirling on the hearth to the sound of his merry jig.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTENT, however, was destined not to stay long with Grandfer.

He was an upright and honourable old man, and when he got to the silence of his chamber that night he began to think instead of dropping into his usual wholesome sleep.

He tossed from side to side of the bed; he murmured prayers; even the Bible underneath his pillow seemed unable to protect him.

At last he started up in bed, and beads of perspiration burst upon his brow.

"Oh! Loord, I'll zee töy't!" he cried. "I'll mak' it all zo plain's a pikestaff, Loord, eef 'e'll only tak' off these unaisiness!"

After that he lay quiet, and in a little while fell asleep.

The next morning, after breakfast, he put on all his best clothes.

"Where be gwin, vather?" inquired Annie. "'Ave 'ee mistook the day? 'Tain't Saturday!"

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"I knows, I knows! Business I've a-got what ll tak' me away a hour or two."

He went into the yard, and drove out with Polly in the springcart.

"What be 'e after?" said Miah to himself.

Then, with a sudden thought, he put bridle on the other mare and rode out after Grandfer.

He rode cautiously. He did not wish to be seen.

Grandfer drove along unconscious that he was followed.

At length they reached the hill leading into the town, and Grandfer proceeded, and crossed the river by the bridge.

But Miah drew rein on the bank and watched. Polly's white side was a good mark. He observed Grandfer jogging along on the opposite bank of the river, and kept him carefully in view until he turned off beneath an ivied gateway.

"Ah!" said Miah, and there was knowledge, satisfaction, and cunning in his tone. He rode home in a brown-study.

When Cathie came in from school that afternoon Grandfer called her.

"Ma-deear," he said, "nextest market day I'll a-tak' 'ee along wi' me, eef 'ee be a good me-aid! Will 'ee like vor come?"

Cathie clapped her hands.

"Oh, Grandfer, I will be ever so good!" she cried. "An' will 'ee let me drive Polly up the 'ills?"

"Ees, ees, ma-deear, eef 'ee'm güd me-aid!"

"It'll be takkin' of 'er away from 'er schoolin'," said Miah. "When 'er 've a-passed 'er standards, 'er can bide 'long o' Annie for help."

"Never you mind the standards once in a way. The me-aid be sharp 'nough to outstrip mun all."

"What they learns is A B C," said Cathie, twirling round and round in the middle of the kitchen. "Come's that easy!"

"'Er bey a brave scholar!" said Grandfer proudly, and looking at Miah. "A day off don't mak' no manner o' differ'nce to 'er. Dö't, ma-deear?"

"No," said Cathie. "I know my g'ography wi'out a stop;" and she began to repeat at a great rate all the chief towns in Europe.

"Look to thiccy!" cried Grandfer; "'tis amazin'!"

"'Tis," said Miah, turning his narrow eyes on Grandfer. "Wheer do 'er get it from?"

"Ah! the Loord's won'erful 'andy distri-butin' o' brains," said Grandfer; "'tis as aisy for'n to put mun one ple-ace as another."

"I reckon they'm forced for come accordin' to. When I tills they early tetties, I don't ordain for gather kidney beans. So far's I can mind, Liza 'adn't no more brain nor a rabbit."

"Ah, but 'ee never zeed 'er 'usband!"

"Nor nobody else," said Miah.

Grandfer was walking towards the door, but he wheeled round at this.

"Look 'ee 'ere! I'm lusty yet!" he cried. "None o' your imprence under these roof!"

Miah muttered sulkily that he had meant none. In spite of his weight and strength he was a coward.

"Mind 'ee self, then!" said Grandfer, "or I'll 'ave 'ee out o' doo-or!"

The colour was high in the old man's cheek. His fingers twitched nervously.

"For love o' God, vather, keep quiét!" said Annie, trembling.

"Vor love o' God nor no man will I stan' by an' zee muck drowed over the dead! The dead can't spake vor theirselves; but 'ere's a man," and here Grandfe tapped the chest that had once been broad and full,—"'ere's a man, I zay, as can spake vor'n. Liza was a good honest me-aid, an' the man as zays other 'll 'ave to pay the price o' 'is words to me!"

So saying, the old man turned away; but when he reached the door, he looked back and fixed his flashing eye on Miah. Righteous indignation gives a marvellous dignity to the human form. Even where the form is poor and deformed, it becomes in such a moment possessed of beauty. Grandfer had been a fine and handsome figure in his day: in this brief instant, youth came back once more through the worn-out frame.

How easy to picture eternal youth hereafter, when even here we can assume it for one beautiful instant,—when the mind shines out through the frail casket, revealing the eternal jewel within!

CHAPTER V.

WHEN market morning came, Cathie could scarcely restrain her excited delight. As she mounted to Grandfer's side, and settled herself while old Polly moved slowly out of the yard, the beautiful little face was wreathed in smiles.

Polly, though a reliable mare in the collar, was not fast, and their progress along the highroad to Upcott was therefore slow. But to the child it was not wearisome: the rattle of the other carts that overtook them, the cheery cries of "Mornin', Master Tythycott!" as the neighbours jogged past them, filled her with the sense of a wonderful workaday world, where Master Tythycott was, after all, only a unit.

They reached Upcott—all too soon for the child's fancy—and Polly was tied up in the same box with half-a-dozen other amiable mares, and the cart was run back to the side of the road, with shafts in air, to make the more room for others.

Then Grandfer began to make his progress towards the market inn. But every other person he

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encountered was "Hail fellow well met!" Now and again he met an old friend, and then the two old cronies would stand together, shaking heads and cracking jokes, till a sense of duty would strike one or other of them, and he would say, "Well, us mus' be movin' 'long! Mak' 'aste while the sun shin'th, as the proverb 'ath it!" And winking their blue eyes, and mirth glowing in their apple cheeks, they would pass away from each other, making half a million nods to the minute.

"Come, ma-deear! come 'long!" said Grandfer at last, as if it had been the child who had loitered and gossiped,—“come 'long now! come 'long! Us mus'n bide so long about!” and he led the way into the “Long Bider Inn.”

Presumably this inn was called “Long Bider” because people were supposed to be so comfortable when they once got inside that they could not get out again!

Grandfer led the way into a little beery parlour, where the heads of the people passing to and fro on the other side of the wire window-blind made Cathie quite giddy. Here he seated himself, and anxiously waited; and presently a friend arrived.

They shook hands,—not jovially, but seriously, as men who have a heavy duty to perform.

The friend was an old, white-haired, wizened man in black clothes. He turned slowly—after he and Grandfer had been shaking hands with each other a long minute without speaking—evidently for the

purpose of observing the child. Cathie sat on the window-sill. Her attitude had the graceful modesty of a child unaccustomed to meeting strangers, but her dark eyes glowed courageously as they met the new-comer's. The stale smell of the carpets and curtains had turned her pale. A glance was sufficient for him.

"For God's sake!" he cried, and he began to tremble violently.

The child heard and wondered.

"'Tain't zo notticeable when 'er's coloured up like," said Grandfer behind his hand. "'Er bey that faint to 'er stomick, 'er turns away like that zo soon as 'er bey wheer it might 'appen be bit fusty-like."

"The Lord have mercy on us!" was all the old man said again; and he heaved a shuddering sigh, and shambled towards the door, which he held open wide, allowing the child to pass through first.

The three of them proceeded up Market Street, and presently down into a wider and quieter thoroughfare.

"There 'tis!" said Cathie, pointing opposite to a brass plate on which was written—

*"Messrs Thimberley and Makepeace,
Solicitors."*

She had caught the names as the two old men walked forward in close conversation. Grandfer started. Then he turned to his companion, "'Er be zo bright as a button!" he exclaimed.

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"Cudd'n bey no other," answered the other, and they stopped at the brass plate and rang the bell.

"Oh, Grandfer, let me ring the bell!" cried the child, springing forward. But she was too late.

Her face clouded; but just as she was thinking whether she would not pout over it, she caught the stranger's eye. She broke into a little sunny laugh, and hid behind her grandfather's coat-sleeve.

The pale blue eyes of the little old man suffused with tears.

"Grandfer, what be us gwin in 'ere fer?" asked Cathie, as they waited.

"Hush, ma-deear!" said Grandfer.

Then the office-boy opened the door, and they were shown into a room with two high counting-desks, over the rails of which two young men regarded them with curiosity, until the lawyer appeared at the door of an adjoining room, when they instantly became absorbed in their work, and the scratching of their pens filled the silence.

The lawyer beckoned them into the inner room, indicated chairs with a wave of the hand, seated himself, and asked—

"Now, what can I do for you?"

Grandfer, who was sitting with Cathie between his knees, looked nervously towards his old white-haired friend; but the latter's agitation was so extreme that he could not sufficiently command his voice to speak.

The lawyer sat gnawing the tip of his thumb, and

looking from one to the other with his narrow dancing eyes.

Then the old white-haired man controlled himself.

"If you please, sir," he said, edging his chair a little nearer to the lawyer,—“if you please, sir—of course, sir, I understand, sir, nothing that us speaks now will go any further, sir?”

The lawyer took his thumb from his mouth an instant.

"Certainly not," he said. "We treat all our business as strictly confidential."

The two old men hummed and hawed, and looked at each other with painful indecision. The lawyer gnawed his thumb.

"Us wants to make a kind of statement," at last the little old man in black clothes said. "Us wants to say something in black and white writ in clerkly 'and, and sealed with the seal in a proper manner, and us wants to sign it, both on us, and the little maid to sign it too. Now, would that be proper legal?"

"What is the statement you wish to make?" inquired the lawyer.

Again the two old men looked at each other helplessly.

"Mebbe," said Grandfer, on whose cheek a bright pink spot now burned,—“mebbe,” appealing to his old friend—“mebbe us 'ud bes' ways leave it vor 'nother market?"

"No time like the present," said the lawyer.

"If you please, sir, beggin' your pardon, is Mr Thimberley to home?"

"Well, I'm Mr Makepeace, you know, and it's generally I that am wanted," said the lawyer, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Mr Thimberley, sir, I've known for many years," said the little man pathetically.

"You can see him, of course," replied Mr Makepeace, and as he touched the bell sharply at his side he gnawed his thumb a little harder. These old men had roused his curiosity.

"Clients for Mr Thimberley as soon as he is disengaged," he said to the office-boy who answered the summons.

Then these three country people, the two agitated old men and the child with her dark eyes fixed observantly first on one and then on the other, were shown into Mr Thimberley's office.

Mr Thimberley was an immense broad-shouldered man, with one of those inscrutable faces which some people interpreted into downright honest implacable virtue, and others into unprincipled bare-faced roguery.

The little man was at home here at once.

He fell on his knees, and caught the lawyer's hands between his own.

"Oh, sir!" he said, his teeth chattering, "these 'ere business be mortal confident!"

"It is safe with me," the lawyer answered.

"Safe, sir? Safe as God's sinners in hell?"

"Yes, yes," the lawyer replied, a little impatiently, and taking out his watch.

"Us wants to write it out 'ere, sir ; and there won't be no 'casion for you to know the precise nature of the letterin', sir ; but us'll write it, and you'll testify us 'ave a-wrote it, an' sign your name to it, sir. Us wants to put that on our deathbeds ; and, before God Almighty, us swear to the truth o' these words—that they be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth !"

The lawyer glanced again at his watch.

"You should have written it all out at home," he said. "You'd better go to an inn and write it, and come back again."

"For the love of heaven," said the little man, "let us write it all here ! Why, one or t'other of us might be struck down with death 'fore us got back—or a sheet o' the paper might drop out of hand—or—oh ! if you've pity in your heart, sir, let us now, while God's a-rappin' at our hearts—his'n and mine," pointing to Grandfer—"let us write it, and do our little part for rem'dy the evil !"

"H'm," said Mr Thimberley ; "well, it's just my luncheon-time, so if you look sharp about it you can use this room. Here's paper and pen," and he went out.

Then the two old men began slowly and laboriously making out their statement. They did it whispering, so that the child, all attention, all wakeful curiosity, though she was, could gather nothing.

She sat where she was bidden, on a high stool at the farther end of the dingy little room—an important factor in the case, entirely ignorant that the whole course of her life was being decided in this musty apartment, into which she had never entered before and never would again.

The clock ticked on the mantelpiece, the pen scratched laboriously over the paper, sometimes with long pauses, and from time to time the old men's whispers murmured through the oppressive air. Mr Thimberley returned. There were more whisperings. And at last the little one lost interest in it all, and swung her legs to and fro, and thought of dinner and shops and the drive home again.

And all the while, with every scratch in the parchment, angels were guarding her; and who is to say, as the three came slowly out of the lawyer's office, their work accomplished, there was not joy in heaven? Is not the eternal design, which has stood from the foundation of the world, Justice?

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Polly came ambling into the yard three hours later, Miah was there waiting. He unharnessed the mare while Grandfer went in to take off his best coat.

"Bide 'ere," he said to Cathie, who was running in joyfully to tell Annie all about everything. "'Old the shafties. Get up, Polly! Where did 'ee go 'long o' Grandfer?"

"Us went all up Market Street, an' I seed in's shop-windies. In one windy there was trumpets an' fiddles, an', my! such a sight o' books, an' 'underds o'——"

"Did Grandfer speak along o' any one?" interrupted Miah. "Bide a minute now, can't 'ee, 'gainst I tak' out the packages! Did Grandfer tak' 'ee anywheres?"

"Us went into market. Oh, an' us went into 'torney's, and Granfer an' 'nother ol' man an' Mr Thimberley did a sight o' writin'!"

"What did mun write?" asked Miah, dropping one of the parcels in his eagerness.

"I don't know," said the child, whirling round on one of her restless little feet, and taking a bite out of a large juicy apple.

Miah caught her arm roughly, and the apple fell rolling in the mud.

"There now!" said Cathie, "'ee've a-spoiled my apple, you ol' toad! 'Ee was a sweet un, tō! I shan't tell 'ee nothin' more, no more I won't."

She picked up the apple and regarded it ruefully.

"That b'ain't hurted nothin'," said Miah.

"The pigs can 'ave it!" she answered, throwing it into the sty. "I ain't gwin for bite on muck!"

"I'll give 'ee a penny if 'ee can mind what 'torney said," said Miah, bending his beery face close to her. "You'm such a clever little maid, I'm certain sure 'ee'll mind it."

"I can't then, so there! Bring in the old packages yerself!"

She ran into the house.

"'Tis 'er — wickedness!" said Miah. "'Er sees I want for know, so 'er keeps it close! I knows one thing—they went to the 'torney's; so there's some'at afoot, for sure!"

He turned to the mare and kicked her in the ribs because she was thirsty and drinking longer than his patience could stand.

"I'll get to know the rights o't if I die for't," he said, as he led the mare into the stable.

To find out "the rights" of a thing is, however,

not easy where ignorance and dignified reserve are the only two fortresses to be attacked.

Miah felt sure it was something to do with money, but beyond this he could not get. He was not clever, only exceedingly avaricious; and though avarice may accomplish much, brains accomplish more.

As time passed, and nothing further transpired to awaken his suspicion or interest, the circumstances that had at first done so sank into a dim perspective. Yet at times he still wondered, and on these occasions he revived himself with the thought that Grandfer would be sure to become voluble as he grew older.

Then Miah's opportunity would come.

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CHAPTER VII.

A YEAR passed. Seedtime and harvest had followed each other, and the early and the latter rain, with the old time-worn regularity. Life at 'Postle Farm, like the life on its steep ridges, followed its ordinary course, with but little variation.

Only the child Cathie was taller, and something of dreamland crept into her eyes; where she had once danced, she paced with slow and thoughtful air; a new world was beginning to slowly open for her.

One afternoon she came home from school swinging her satchel in her hand. The melody of the spring afternoon was in all her being. The western sun had crept low towards the opposite hill, and the side of the farm towards her was in deep shadow.

The rooks were calling from their nests high up in the elm trees, and an occasional seagull wheeled upward from the river.

Cathie loved the elms. Her favourite strolling ground was underneath their shadows, where the

droppings from the boughs had worn away the grass, and the long knotted roots had sucked up the moisture, and left a dry beaten track for her light footfall. Here she played—more rarely now—that the great arching branches were the roof of her “hall,” and the hollows and the worn places where the rabbits ran—and the gnarled roots—forming themselves into squares and triangles—were her “rooms.” Odd bits of crockery, ranged in rows, were her china-shop; here, where the red earth dipped, and a twisted root ran in a half circle, was her armchair. She and Bessie had named them all; or rather, she had named them, and Bessie had acquiesced.

On this spring afternoon Cathie came sauntering slowly forward in her white pinafore and her kitty-bonnet. She was in no hurry to enter the farmhouse, having had her tea with Bessie Mollard on her way home from school. So she hung up her satchel on a low-reaching arm of St Matthew, and amused herself rearranging her china-shop. But she soon got tired of this. Taking off her sun-bonnet, she tied it to the satchel, and sauntered down the hill to the river. The tide was out. A group of seagulls stood motionless on the purple sand, looking from a distance like a patch of last winter's snow. The child sat down on the bank and watched them. Presently they rose in slow flight, and she rose too and began searching for birds' nests along the lower hedges.

And presently the tide began to creep up; and where the salt water met the fresh, it eddied into whirlpools. This resistance over, a great volume of water came like a marching regiment of soldiers, bearing all before it. The water swirled and whirled, and licked the sandbanks till they crumbled into little pieces and fell with splashes in the tide. And the child stood and watched, and let the water swirl to her feet, jumping back with a little scream of laughter, and putting in pieces of stick, and clapping her hands when the tide whirled them away.

A young man from the opposite side called out, "Take care! Take care of the current!" but she took no heed. Presently, with the incoming tide came a drifting mist. It crept up the valley till it reached the child; and she held up her little face to it, and it lay in a myriad beads upon her cheeks and in tears upon her eyes. It and the wind together caught her soft hair and curved it into tendrils that clung about her brow. She looked like a spirit of the driving mist as she opened her clear-cut lips like a scarlet goblet and showed her ivory teeth and laughed, as she shut her eyes to keep the rain out. But when she opened her eyes, they were such beautiful human eyes that she did not look like a spirit at all, but a happy child.

The shadows of evening fell upon the lonely hillside, and Cathie turned slowly homewards. The rain beat so fast now that she walked quickly.

Half-way up the hill she paused, and, tossing the wet hair from her eyes, looked down on the brimming river. As she looked, her eyes dilated; she bent forward with a little cry. So wide open and fixed was her gaze, that a night-owl skimming by her did not cause it to flicker for an instant. She stood transfixed, as one seeing much, but terrified to see more.

In the farm kitchen they had taken their seats at the supper-table, when the door burst open and Cathie rushed in. Her face was pale, her eyes were wide open, her wet hair clung to her face.

Annie started to her feet, her hand pressed to her heart.

"Why, chil', how you skeered me!" she faltered.

Cathie took no notice. She ran to her grandfather and hid her face upon his shoulder.

"Theer now, my little me-aid!" he said, tenderly stroking the wet curls and wondering what ailed her.

With her arms still clinging round his neck, she raised her face.

"Grandfer," she whispered, "Grandfer, I zeed—I zeed—*her!*"

At these words each one of her listeners paled.

"The little devil, wi' they blarmed eyes o' hern, always means some'at onlucky!" growled Miah at last.

He looked savagely at the child.

"Go 'long wi' yer ol' rummage!" said Grandfer angrily. "'Tis the mist the chil' zeed. That's what 'twas, right 'nough. T'won't 'arm my little beauty," he said, kissing her.

"It makks me feared," she whimpered.

"I'd mak' 'ee feared for a better cause if I 'ad the rearin' of 'ee!" Miah said beneath his breath, as he rose abruptly from the table.

"You be qui't," said the child, waking up from her terror and speaking like a little spitfire. "Grandfer, tell'n for 'old his tongue."

Grandfer laughed delightedly.

"Bless the chil'," he said, "'er's comin' to 'erself! 'Ere, give 'er some'at vor eat — 'er's clemmed wi' hunger."

Annie cut a thick slice from the loaf, and as she placed it before her she bent over, saying in an undertone, while her despairing eyes searched the little sunny face, "'Ee didn't zee it vor zure, Cathie?"

And Cathie answered, "'Tis so warm an' snug an' quiet some 'ere, 'appen I didn't. Grandfer, shall I ask 'ee a riddle?"

"No, no, ma-deear. 'Ee've mos' skeered the life out o' your aunt. Come 'long to bade, an' don't put 'ee mind to voolishness."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Cathie woke the next morning she romped as usual with her aunt's little golden-haired boy, till his mother came up to dress him. Cathie had often begged to be allowed to do this, but the mother's love for the child was so great she could not bear any one to share in the trouble of him. She was pleased for Cathie to play with him; but to care for him, to bathe and dress him, to hush him when he cried, was her part: and in this she would brook no rival.

As Cathie washed and dressed herself in the room that seemed so quiet now Willie was gone, she grew thoughtful. She always took a considerable time dressing, and Willie was asleep in his crib, and her aunt frying bacon for breakfast, by the time she came downstairs.

She looked so fresh and dainty with her soft glossy hair tied back, and in her clean frilled pinafore! Many a heart in rich childless homes might well have ached to claim her.

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her aunt, till twice Annie almost tripped over her, and finally nearly ran into her with a boiling kettle.

"Do 'ee mind 'eeself!" she cried, silent and patient though she usually was, stung suddenly into sharp speech in spite of herself. "What bey doin' of? You'm right under my feet ever since 'ee comed down, an' I just upon come for upset this 'ere boil-hot kettle o' watter over 'ee. Why can't 'ee go 'long?"

Cathie moved back; but presently she was edging back to her aunt's side again. Annie, turning suddenly with the frying-pan in her hand, only just saved herself from burning the child by a sudden movement which sent some of the hissing fat over on to the clean flagging.

"Pon my soul, Cathie, I'll skat 'ee in a minute! I will, for sure! Go 'long an' sit down on thickey chair till I tell 'ee to move."

"I've got some'at for say to 'ee, Aunt Annie," said Cathie, looking at her aunt with a troubled expression. "I feel that bad about Willie."

"Willie!" said the mother, with a quick glance towards the cradle. "What's wrong wi' un?"

She put down the frying-pan and bent over the cradle.

"He's right now," said Cathie; "but—oh, auntie!—I zeed the Shinin' Lady, an' Miah saith whenever I zee 'er it be onlucky!"

Annie shoved her off with her elbow and shuddered.

"Crazy maid you be," she said. "Mak' haste an' sit down to your breaksus; you'll be late for school else!"

Cathie appeared only half satisfied. She threw off her fear with an effort, and sat down to breakfast. When her breakfast was over, she went to put on her kitty-bonnet and to unhang her satchel from the hook behind the door. She seemed to have quite recovered her spirits, until she found both her bonnet and her satchel missing. Then she remembered she had left them hanging on the arm of the first Apostle. With this recollection came back the memory of her walk in the dusk and the rain.

"I'll bide home 'long o' Willie," she said, suddenly turning to Annie; then, catching sight of Willie awakening from his sleep, she ran to the cradle, and brown curls and yellow curls got all mixed up together, and the baby screamed and gurgled with delight, and held on to Cathie's hair so tight that she could not get away. And Annie's face relaxed, and she smiled down on them.

But presently she urged Cathie again to fetch her bonnet and her satchel and to start for school.

"I've a-got vor put my bootses on," said the child, and she drew a little stool to the fire and sat down on it.

She was always given to sudden day-dreaming, and as she sat in her stockinged feet and began to loosen the laces in her boots, her eye fell on

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the dancing flames, and she dropped the boot on her lap, and sat staring into the fire.

It attracted her aunt's attention.

"What be gawkin' at?" she asked.

But the child did not hear.

Annie looked at her a moment and shuddered. Then, coming quietly to the fire, she turned the top log, bottom side up, murmuring, "The Lord be wi' us!"

"Oh, auntie! 'ee've a-spoiled my pictur'!" cried Cathie.

At the same moment a piece of coal popped out on to the middle of the flagging.

"There's a coffin!" cried Cathie, moving back quickly.

"What do 'ee gawk 'm's vire vor?" said Annie testily. Then she sat down, for the strength had gone out of her.

Cathie did not observe her aunt's agitation. She laced her boots and sprang to her feet.

"Don't let Willie out, auntie, 'vore I come back, an' I'll tak' un out vor gather lent-roses—shall I, Willie? Wull 'ee come 'long Cathie?"

She bent down and put her arms round him, as he stood beating a tattoo against the door with his fat little fists.

He stretched out his arms to her as she sprang over the board placed at the door to keep him in.

"Not now!" cried Cathie. "When I come back along!"

The child cried after her, and Annie, vexed, called to the laughing child—

"What do 'ee go zaying that vor? What's chil' un'erstan' 'bout 'ee comin' back?"

"Mind what I tell 'ee—don't let'n out 'vore I come back! 'E'll be ever so pleased then!"

But the child still cried after her, and she ran back and kissed him.

"When Cathie comes back!" she said, and she drew from her pocket her own rosy apple and gave it to him.

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CHAPTER IX.

IT was four o'clock in the afternoon. The long shadows of the elms fell across the farmyard. A brooding stillness hung over the place. The clock ticked in the corner of the kitchen. The cocks and hens were away on the hillside foraging. There was no life anywhere round the house.

Then faintly from the distance came the sound of a pickaxe falling dully in moist soil. Annie was up in the little garden at the back tilling potatoes. She came in after a while, carrying in one hand a basket smelling freshly of new-turned earth, while she led her toddling boy with the other. They entered the silent house together.

"Up-a-daisy!" said Annie, as the little fat legs struggled to mount the steps; and the silent house echoed with his baby laughter.

She put the board up before the door. She could not quite forget Cathie's words, though she affected to despise them. She took off her baby's hat, but he roguishly put it on again. He loved the sunshine.

Annie glanced at the clock. It was later than she expected to find it. The bread had yet to be baked. She lifted the heavy pan of dough on to the table, and turning it out, began to knead it. Willie came to her and wanted to be taken up, but her hands were over flour, and she could only stoop for a hurried moment and kiss him.

Presently she ran out to fetch more wood. There was a large log that had fallen close to the steps, but it was too heavy for her to lift. She tried, then stood upright and pressed her hand to her side.

Slipping the board out of the groove that held it, she dragged the log over the steps and across the floor. Her husband and her father would soon be in now, and she wanted the baking quickly done. She put the log on the fire and took down the bellows.

Meanwhile Willie, playing near the door, perceived his opportunity. He accomplished the steps in safety, and with a little gurgle of delight started off on a voyage of discovery.

The mother blew the fire within. The sound of the crackling wood and the breathing of the bellows filled the silence.

It was when she rose and had hung up the bellows, and spread out the cloth for tea, that the silence fell upon her sense like the knell of a funeral bell.

"Willie!" she cried. "Where's my Willie?"

Then her eye fell on the boardless doorway.

She was not alarmed, she told herself. What did

Cathie's old truck matter? She walked across the yard and looked down the hill over the close-cropped grass towards the brimming river. In spite of herself she gave a sigh of relief. He was nowhere in sight, and if he had been on his way to the river, it would have been impossible for him to be out of sight yet. She turned back into the yard with a light heart.

"Willie! Willie!" she called.

He was nowhere in sight. She looked into the shippon, and behind the cart-shed, and down by the pig-sties. Then her breath began to come painfully and her knees to tremble. She had forgotten the pond. She ran to it. Round the extremest edges the water still trembled in a broad circle. She told herself it was the wind. She peered into its depths, crying "Willie, Willie!"

The rumbling of wheels came over the steep hillside. She ran towards the sound. Grandfer and Miah were returning with the carts.

"I've a-los' Willie!" she cried in a husky whisper.

The noise of the carts prevented their hearing, but her white-scared face made even Miah pull up his horse.

"Pshaw!" he said when he heard her words. "Come up, Polly!" and he cracked his whip and went on. But Grandfer got down from the butt and left his horse standing.

"Los' mun?" he asked.

"Ees, I've los' un!"

"He's sleepin' zumwheer."

"No; he 'an't been gone ten minutes, an' 'e'd slep' in the vorenoon!"

Then they both looked towards the pond.

"He's een 'bouts," said Grandfer.

And they both looked together, but they could not find him.

"He's sleepin' zumwheer," said Grandfer; and again they both looked towards the pond.

He was sleeping somewhere: his bed was soft; his rest was sweet.

Then Grandfer bethought him of the footprints. He traced them from the steps straight across the yard. Then they lost them for a bit. But they found them once again, close beside the water's edge. The water had swilled half into one.

Trembling like a leaf, Grandfer called to Miah. He came slouching across the yard to the pond. Annie was clinging to the limb of a tree to keep herself from falling.

Near the bank a rosy apple floated. Grandfer pointed to it, but nobody spoke. They began with rakes and poles to drag the pond. For a long time only rotten twigs and decayed leaves came up.

Annie was now like a thing demented. She tore down her hair and threw off her apron, screaming—

"You may drag! you may drag! He bain't there, I tell 'ee! he bain't there!"

Something resisted the pressure of Grandfer's rake. The old man turned an ashen white as

slowly through the muddy water came the hand of a little child.

The mother did not wait. She plunged in above her waist, and caught the wet clothes, and pulled the child towards her. Then grasping him in her arms she sped with him to the house, and throwing herself into a chair before the fire, she chafed the little dripping limbs. Again and again she kissed the poor little blanched lips and pressed the curly head against her breast.

Grandfer wanted to draw off the wet clothes, but Annie only murmured—

“No, no ; us can’t stay ! us can’t stay !”

When the doctor came he was angry.

“You should have wrapped the child in warm blankets at once !” he said.

“Go ’long !” she answered. “Do ’ee s’pose a mother can’t fend for ’er own as ’as drawn the nourishment from her breast an’ been closer to ’er nor any other ?”

Even the doctor’s authority could scarcely persuade her to leave her hold of the child. She clung to it as they dragged it from her and laid it on the table.

“How long since you found it ?”

The door pushed open and Cathie entered. She was coming in hurriedly. Her lips were parted, her eyes strained.

The moment her glance fell on the little form lying out straight and still, she screamed, then stood a moment staring at the sight. One little

dimpled hand hung over the edge of the table, and five clear diamonds, God's own jewels, hung one on each finger-tip, and then fell one by one like fast-dropping tears.

Cathie's face became possessed with fury. She ran at the distraught mother.

"What did I tell 'ee?" she screamed. "Didn't I tell 'ee to keep un in 'vore I come back?" She shook her fiercely as she spoke.

The woman's eyes were riveted on the still countenance of her dead baby; she did not heed.

The doctor had drawn off the clothes now. He wrapped a blanket round, and began to try and induce the burdened lungs to act. He had no hope, but for the mother's sake he did it.

At length he put his ear to the heart for the last time. There was no motion. Then he put his hand kindly on the poor thing's shoulder.

"You must try and make up your mind to bear it," he said.

She looked at him in a dazed way. Already it seemed to her years and years and years since she had missed her child from her side and called to him "Willie! Willie!"

"The child is quite drowned," the doctor said. "He is dead."

She raised dull, uncomprehending eyes. Then they wandered from the doctor to Cathie, and in an instant her whole face became disfigured with fury.

"You done it!" she shrieked. "You she-devil! You gawked in's vire! You cast avil eye on un! Go to damnation with yer tricks!"

Before any one could check her, she hurled herself on Cathie and flung her madly backwards. The child fell heavily on the sharp edge of the fender and lay still.

"Take the woman!" said the doctor. "Take her away from the room, or she will do more mischief. She has done enough here already, God knows!" And he stooped over the livid face of poor little Cathie.

CHAPTER X.

FOR a fortnight Cathie remained **unconscious**. Then slowly the light filtered back. She spoke rationally, ate and slept, rose from her bed, and performed the ordinary duties of the day; but her mind was a blank. She could recall nothing of her little cousin, nor of what she had learnt at school. She could remember no one's name; she met old familiar friends as strangers.

"What be 'ee a-called?" she inquired of her aunt. When told who she was she replied—

"Ah! but you'm startin' 'vore long on a long, long journey—an' 'ee won't come back nether!"

Grandfer heard her, and brushed the tears from his eyes. It was Sunday evening, and he had sat down in the window-sill to have a quiet pipe. "I mind," he said presently, with a view to diverting himself and others—"I mind, when I was a young man, when a lad died mun always 'ad zix young women vor be bearers töy'n. Likewise, when 'twas a young 'oman mun 'ad zix young men—lads like—vor car'n; an' they always took the corpse 'long

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the lych roo-ads töy grave. I mind zo well as can be, theer was a young man as died suddent-like—Johnny Morrison I mind 'e was a-called; an' us 'ad young women to car'n across the church-yard, an' my sister Ann, 'er was one o' mun. Well, theer was a mortal 'igh wind a-blowin', an' as 'er come 'vore 'er los' 'er 'at—whizzled away, 'e did—one wi' veathers in un 'er'd a-bought a parpose, an' 'e went through a puddle, an' never weren't fit for nought arter! I mind it zo well as can be. But the strangestest part is vor come. Long whiles after, 'ees brother an' another young chap was out newsin' late o' nights, an' they bided nigh the church ge-ate 'vore mun zaid good-night—as young men will—vor one 'ad to go westward an' t'other zouth. An' as they bided theer one o' mun zeed a big black dog a-comin' 'vore, an' 'e zaid, 'Zee me 'eave stone to thiccy black dog!' an' t'other caught un by 's arm an' zaid, 'Thiccy ain't no dog!' An' 'e stop kind o' skeert, an' theer was a coffin a-comin' along zo large as life, wi'out no bearers, but jus' movin' 'long zame as eef theer was! An' through the ge-ate 'e went—ge-ate openin' an' shuttin' vor'n silent-like. An' they rinned 'vore, the both o' mun, an' theer wasn't nought theer—only, jus' as they come back, a me-aid's 'at kind o' whizzled past. Then they thought on Johnny Morrison, an' 'air o' mun stood on's end. An' they'd tell 'ee the truth o't over an' over, an' cüdd'n nether one of 'em abide to be out le-ate

'gin the churchyard ge-ate arter! Ah! I've yert tell o' strange zights! strange zights, zure 'nough!"

"An' I've zeed mun!" cried Cathie.

"Never mind what 'ee've zeed! 'Old yer tongue!" said Annie sharply.

The child turned wounded eyes, like the eyes of an animal, on her aunt, and was silent. Just then the sheep-dog rose growling, and a moment later a stranger knocked at the door. The little drowned boy had now been buried six weeks, but the words for the tombstone had not yet been decided on. Grandfer had told the poet of the neighbourhood, the village grocer's assistant, to call at 'Postle Farm on this particular Sunday evening, in order to arrange a suitable verse for the tombstone.

He entered now, looking important and consequential.

"Us wants zome'at becomin' vor püt on's 'ead-stone," said Grandfer. "Us knows as 'ow you mad' zome zeemly lines when ol' Beer to Stretchaway Varm geeve over, an' us thought maybe you might a-manage zome'at zeemly vor us, dunnee zee?"

"Certainly," said the young man, taking out a pencil and paper from his pocket, and beginning to flourish the pencil in imaginary curves over the blank sheet, while he stretched his arms out so as to show his white linen cuffs to advantage. "Certainly."

"Dunnee mak' it too long," said Miah; "letterin' comes expensive."

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"No, no! Oh, dear me, no! We'll make it a suitable length," said the young man. "Let me see. What were the details? Child aged twenty-one months—drowned where? River, I suppose?"

"Een's pond," said Grandfer. "Oh, 'twas a cruel dathe vor zuch a bonny vlower!"

He brushed his coat-sleeve over his eyes and looked across at his daughter. The poor stricken thing sat rocking herself to and fro. Oh for the balm of tears! But the frozen well held them tight.

The young man's eyes followed the direction of Grandfer's. He smoothed the paper out once more, and with another flourish of the pencil began:—

"Weep no more, thou mother fond——"

"But 'er ain't weepin'!" objected Miah.

"Hasn't 'er wept at all?" inquired the poet, suspending his pencil.

"Not a tear! not a tear!" said the old man, bursting into tears himself.

The poet looked disconcerted; but, recovering, he licked the point of his pencil and started writing, saying comfortably—

"Ah, but 'er will weep! Leastways, 'er did ought to. Fond o' the child, I s'pose?"

"Fond o't!" cried Grandfer, rising from his chair. "Fond o't! My God! my God! Vond o' it, did 'ee zay? Poor critter! Lord 'a mercy on 'er, my

poor little Annie, as was a chil' 'erself not zo many year agone !”

“Weep no more, thou mother fond,”

repeated the young man, sucking the end of his pencil,

“For this thy babe drowned in the pond.

She——

Boy or girl ?”

“Boy ; beautiful golden-'aired pictur' of a little angel !” said Grandfer. “Ah, Loord, Loord, 'twas won'erful cruel of 'ee !”

“He soon will wait thee in realms above,
Where all is light and peace and love !

There ! What do you think of that ?”

Grandfer scratched his head. “It don't zcem vor give it zomeways,” he said slowly. “Zeems as ef 'twasn't my bonny boy someways !”

“H'm,” said the poet, discouraged. “Well,” he said, after a moment, “p'raps I'd bestways take it home an' think over't a bit.”

He got up, and brushed some whitewash off his sleeve, and raked his side curls upwards before replacing his hat.

“I'll look in through the week,” he said. “Afternoon.”

Cathie rose from the corner where she had been cowering near the fire. She followed the young man out.

"I can tell 'ee zome'at to zay!" she said. "Tak' out pencil an' write."

The young man stared at her, and chucked her under the chin.

"My dear," he said, "I've just failed myself. What should you know about epitorphs?"

"Write!" said Cathie, gripping him by the arm. "Write!"

To please her he took out his pencil; but presently, as the words flowed smoothly off her tongue, he exclaimed—

"My word!" And when it was finished, "Is that all?"

Cathie nodded her head.

"Well, look here," said the young man, producing a threepenny-bit; "don't say as how you done it—see?—and you shall have this here!"

Cathie took the threepence, and the young man re-entered the house.

"See," he said, "when I got out it all came to me plain as a pikestaff, and I'll read it to 'ee.

"In the cold pond my limbs were chilled,
My blood with deadly horror thrilled,
My feeble pulse forgot to play,
I fainted twice, then died away.
All means were tried my life to save,
But could not keep me from the grave!"

"That'll do vine!" said Grandfer, while the mother said hoarsely, "Read un again!"

Then as the young man ceased she cried, "'E

k'nows us tried vor sav'n ; 'e knows I 'eld un to my bosom, an' loved un, an' gave un all the life I could ! " and burst into tears.

Grandfer, with the tears streaming down his own withered cheeks, knelt beside her chair and drew her head upon his breast ; while Miah, going up close to the young man's ear, asked—

" Won't so much letterin' come expensive ? "

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CHAPTER XI.

ON Saturday night Miah stayed late at "The Swan" drinking his hard-earned money away in cheap whisky. Annie placed a light in the kitchen window and came up to bed.

After a while she came into Cathie's room.

"I can't bide over there!" she said; "I be so lonesome wi'out my little lamb!"

"Come along in 'ere wi' me, then," said Cathie, throwing back the bedclothes.

She could not remember the little lost lamb her aunt spoke of, but her heart told her her aunt was sad and lonely, and she welcomed the poor thing to her warm bed. Her own heart beat for a little with a suffocating feeling, for always, until now, the poor stricken mother had avoided her. Every one had said cruel things of her that were not true. They had said she cast an evil eye on the baby and it had been drowned. What baby? She knew no baby but Mrs Mollard's, and that baby was living still. But now perhaps the tide was going to turn, and people were going to welcome her back,

and praise her, and call her pretty names. This was the atmosphere she had been accustomed to, and the cold climate of suspicion and hatred poisoned her being and threatened to change her sunny temperament.

She cried softly as she lay beside her aunt, but she hid her tears.

She was sleeping when Miah's heavy step came up the stair. His wife had, however, wakened at the first sound of his approach. She had heard the dull footfall coming down the steep hillside behind, and the click of his iron-toed boot against the stones. One stone caused him to stumble. It rolled away and hit the gate-post with a dull thud. Then the gate opened and fell back with a clang; the door downstairs was closed noisily, and the heavy step came up the stair. The door of the opposite room opened and shut.

It was then that Annie woke the child.

"He's gone in!" she said. "Mebbe he won't miss of me!"

She laid her hand on Cathie's arm. The hand trembled.

"What be feared on?" asked the child.

"I b'ain't feared on nothin'."

At that moment the door opposite reopened, and in an angry voice Miah Sluman thundered out—

"Annie, wheer be 'ee to?"

"Oh, he's angered!" cried Annie; and the bed began to shake under her.

"What'll us do?" cried Cathie. "Us'll hide."

Just then the door burst open. Miah stood holding a rushlight and glaring into the room.

"Be 'ere?" he growled.

"'Ees; I was just a-comin'," said Annie, rising, white as her nightgown.

He glared savagely at her, strode heavily and unsteadily across the room, and set down the rushlight on the mantelshelf.

"I'll teach 'ee to come!" he said.

The woman, white and scared, moved towards the door.

"I'm gwin," she said; "I'm theer avore 'ee."

But he stepped in front of her. Then she screamed, and flung herself on her knees before him.

"For the love o' God, don't be' ard on me, Miah!"

At that moment Cathie, who had been sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, her lips set firm, flew with a sudden movement to the mantelshelf and knocked over the rushlight.

"Now, where be 'er?" she cried triumphantly, and dragging Annie to her feet, she pulled her through the door before the man could recover his dazed senses sufficiently to prevent her.

"Come," said Cathie when they were in the passage. "Come quickly 'long o' Grandfer." Annie, surprised at the child's sudden return to her former quickness, followed her.

Grandfer was lying with his good ear on the

pillow and had heard nothing. The sound of his regular breathing caused Annie to burst into a passion of thankful tears. All her life long her father had been to her a haven of refuge.

Miah, cursing and swearing, stumbled down the passage in search of them. He had given himself a black eye groping for matches, and the pain had somewhat sobered him. Instead of searching further for Annie, he groped his way into his own room. They heard the bed creak as he flung himself heavily on it.

Then, with their teeth chattering with cold and fright, they crept back to Cathie's room.

The child slept, but the woman lay awake till dawn. With the first twitter of the birds, the first grey waking to a world of grief, she slipped noiselessly out of bed and crept like a guilty thing into her husband's. He stirred uneasily and flung a heavy hand across her face. The pain made her wince; but at least the blow was unintentional. She crept nearer to the edge of the bed, and lay, with unseeing eyes, staring at the gradual glimmering of the dawn through the square window-panes, and hearing with dull ears the first twittering of awakening birds.

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CHAPTER XII.

ONE Saturday night, about two months later, Miah came home drunk.

He staggered upstairs, and seeing his wife asleep, in a fit of drunken malevolence he threw the contents of the washhand basin over the miserable woman. Drenched to the skin, she dared not move till her lord and master lay sleeping soundly.

Then she got up, shivering with the cold, and with tired numb fingers put on a dry night-gown, and slept as best she might on the draughty floor. It was the beginning of the chill October weather, and Annie was of a weakly constitution and melancholy disposition. The tragic loss of her baby had proved almost the last straw on shoulders already heavily weighted; and now the wet, the exposure, and the grief proved too much. She woke next morning in a burning fever. When she tried to get up she fell and cut her face against the leg of the bed.

Miah found her there when he turned lazily out of bed two hours later. She was soaked in

blood and in a dead faint. At first he thought he had been violent to her in the night, and feared he had killed her. It was the fear of the consequence on himself that caused him hastily to slip on his clothes and run for Grandfer.

Between them they lifted her on to the bed and tried to restore consciousness; but failing to do so, Grandfer started hurriedly for the doctor.

After a while the blue-veined lids opened wearily, and Miah, in a spasm of thankfulness, cried—

"I didn't mean ter 'urt 'ee, Annie, my dear! Zay 'e felled, will 'ee?"

"'Twasn't 'ee done it," she answered faintly. "I come vor get up, an' couldn't stan'—I fell——"

"Bah! you crazy idjut!" said the man, getting off his knees and slouching to the door; "you mos' drove the senses out o' me! 'Ere 'll be a doctor's bill an' all to pay. 'Tis some'at mad-denin' wi' women; they be always into some'at. Clumsy-footed to-ad, 'ee be!"

All the doctors in the world cannot save a broken heart. The healing balm lies in one hand only. Though Annie struggled through the first violence of her attack, she could do no more. She faded with the year, and the first fall of winter snow fell upon her new-made grave.

CHAPTER XIII.

CATHERINE at the age of twelve entered upon the duties of a woman.

Kindly neighbours stepped in, but the child scowled them away. Her past was a blank; old friends were strangers to her.

After her recovery she had gone to school for a short time, but the children called her "Crazy Cathie" and flung stones at her. And though she fought them like a tigress, she gave it up after a while, and shrank from strange faces and rude tongues.

And the neighbours said, "'Er bey stre-ange, zure 'nough! The chil'ern 'olly to 'er, ' Crazy Cathie!' An' that's what 'er be, zure an' zertain, I b'lieve. I b'lieve 'er's got avil eye right 'nough. Poor Annie, 'er always would 'ave it 'er 'ad; an' I b'lieve 'er 'ad the rights o't!"

Then Mrs Mollard, who was timid, chimed in with—

"Zee 'ow 'er löökéd to me as I come 'vore; an'

when I got back to 'ome, zure 'nough the peg took ill an' died. I knowed 'e would!"

"Theer now!" exclaimed the others, amazed at such conclusive evidence. "Look to thiccy! 'Er be bewitched; 'er 'ath avil eye, zure 'nough. Better ways leave the me-aid, 'vore us zeeth end o't!"

So they left her, and she grew up a child of nature.

The rich luxuriance of her beauty as she reached maturity was great. Had it not been for the belief that she possessed the evil eye, as well as that she was crazy, the humble dwelling would have been thronged with suitors.

As it was, they left her for the most part unmolested.

And she sauntered in the fields, and the warm sun shone upon her, and the rich earth yielded its beauty to her: the wind from heaven wooed her, and Nature opened her warm strong arms and took the girl to her heart, and nourished her.

So she entered on her seventeenth birthday; and though her face was scowling to the workaday world, down within her, her heart was warm; and though her brain was stunted beneath the mass of ignorance that covered it, it struggled—often passionately, always persistently—for expression; and sometimes it found it.

BOOK II.

WHEN THE DAY BREAKS

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CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN he looked from the window he saw it distinctly ; but when he started out to find it, he lost it.

First it amused him ; then it puzzled him ; then it gave him an uncanny feeling, and he did not like it.

He looked at it from the east windows of the room he occupied. First, in the days of his convalescence, he had looked at it with unseeing eyes, yet with a certain sense of rest, as one turns from the glare of the sun to a shady place. But gradually, as he gained in strength, he had begun to weave over it a queer romance. It excited his interest. He wanted to see it closer. He wanted to be transported there and then across the river, without the trouble of movement that had become such a weariness to him. Finally, it became an incentive to health.

There was only a leaky boat to row himself across the broad silent river in ; then a quarter of a mile's ascent over the bare grassy hill flecked with white daisies, to the line of elm trees standing half-way up. There stood those cold bare walls, with ne'er a

window in them—the sloping roof, the patched chimney—that strange, cold, dreamy, weird old farm.

But he dared not use the boat, for the current was strong. He had to take the road for a couple of miles, and cross by the bridge, and follow the winding lane that led eventually to the back of the ridge where the old farm stood.

He did this twice, and each time he failed to find the farm. Then he began to question, Was the farm really there, or did he only fancy it was? Was it an aberration of intellect after his recent fever?

When the servant came into his room one evening he asked him—

“Do you see that old grey building?”

“Where, sir?”

“There—straight across the water—half-way up the hill—the sunlight has caught a pane of glass in the window—do you see? It burns like fire. I declare, that is the first time I ever knew it had a window! Do you see it? Speak, man, quick! Do you see it?”

“Yessir—certainly, sir—yessir.”

“That’s all right, then,” said Temple, heaving a deep sigh of relief and turning from the window. He had had queer fancies during his illness, and they had left his nerves unstrung.

“Mighty strange contrydictorianess!” the man remarked, as he repeated the conversation in the

pantry below. "He'll be all so strange as the old man 'for' he's done. In the blood, don't 'ee see?—bound to come out, though he be only distant relationed. He ain't so bad like the governor nether, though not so good-lookin' accordin' to."

"Well, I've a-yert tell 'e ain't relationed to un at all," replied the other man.

The entrance of the butler prevented any reply. He glanced with angry suspicion from one man to the other.

"What be doin' of?" he inquired.

"Just tellin'."

"Yes, 'jus' tellin'"! 'Atchin' vile valsehoods an' speakin' evil o' digna-tories—that's what you be after! If it warn't for the dignity o' the 'ouse, I'd do wi'out nether one of 'ee!"

The men were silent; only, they made faces behind the butler's back as they returned to their work with a vast show of industry.

In the great silent library the master of the house stood in solitude. The remnants of a singularly handsome physique were still left to him. He was standing before the fire, with his hands in his pockets and his legs astride, as he used to stand in the merry days of his youth. Only, then his head had been thrown back as he swept the room with his brilliant eyes. Now, his head hung heavily forward, the chin resting on the sunken chest. This was the pathetic difference. Every now and then he rolled his fine eyes round the room with a sudden look of appre-

hension. Saving for this, he remained motionless, excepting when his shrunken legs lost their firmness and he shifted his pointed feet with a spasmodic movement to preserve his balance.

Oh! the pathos of extreme old age, that will not own itself vanquished!

Upstairs the young man strode to and fro. His figure, scarcely above average height, was lithe and graceful. Passably good-looking, he fell very far short of the magnificent old man wearing out the evening below him, in sullen solitude. Yet he was more lovable. One had to trust him; and one knew, if he failed one, it would not be for lack of steadfast desire, but because circumstances had proved too strong for him and broken him down as well as you.

"Now I am well, I hate this life!" he burst out. And he turned to the window and drew aside the heavy curtain.

The moon was at the full, and fell in a broad stream of silver across the silent river. In the park the deer were feeding: their antlered horns looked weird and ghostly as they moved them up and down in their eager browsing.

One little light burnt steadily in the place where the old farm stood. He looked at it, till it seemed like a hand beckoning him, or a will-o'-the-wisp, which, do what he would, he must follow.

He turned impatiently from the window and paced the room again.

"I am nothing here!" he said—"nothing but a puppet on strings, pulled this way and that to the whim of an old miser. I must go, or I shall rust—just like an old tin kettle with the bottom kicked out. But supposing he objects and I lose my money? Ah, there's the rub! The poor old chap shuns me, after all, and I daresay will be as glad to be rid of me as I to be rid of him. At any rate, get off for the present I must. But before I go I'll find that old farm, or perish in the effort." So saying, he turned once more to the window.

Clouds had gathered above and on all sides, but just where the moon rode the sky was clear. She looked like a ship in full sail, becalmed upon a placid ocean, and the dark and broken clouds seemed like rocks and treacherous quicksands.

The sense that something was expected of him, that something was coming break the even tenor of his life, was borne in upon him as he gazed. It filled him with a vague uneasiness; and it was late that night before he slept.

CHAPTER XV.

LEANING over the low stone wall, with her magnificent tawny locks gathered into an untidy knot, and her brilliant hazel eyes glaring from under her straight brows, was crazy Catherine. The splendid development of her figure and the inherent dignity of her pose seemed to point to a riper age than seventeen. Yet seventeen summers only had it taken to mould her ripe beauty, to place her a queen amongst her kind.

She drew her shapely arms from the stone wall and stretched herself to her full height, raising her eyes to heaven as though searching an answer in its inscrutable depths to the myriad questions that formed within her.

At that moment the lowering defiance which had disfigured her face left it. She was for that one supreme instant transcendently beautiful. The next moment her eyes dropped from heaven to earth. They met the eager eyes of a man who was on the point of scrambling over the stone wall to greet her. In an instant her face was trans-

formed. She glared at him, and the man, discomfited, fell back.

"Beg pardon, Cathie," he said, humbly. "Seein' as 'ow you was here all 'lone like, I thought mebbe——"

The words died away on his lips, and he turned slowly and went back the way he had come.

The girl's lowering glance followed him. When he had disappeared she laughed scornfully.

"Men be proper fools!" she said. "S'pose I'd wanted he? Well, he didn't s'pose I'd say 'Come'! But there, 'tain't he I want. What is't I want?"

She stretched out her hands, burnt brown with the sun, but beautiful hands for all that.

"What is't I want?" she repeated slowly, and the pupils in the beautiful eyes widened as the thought tried to shape itself in her brain. "I want—I want——" She looked all round her, at the bare expanse of hill before, at the sandy bed of the river beneath, and beyond it, embowered in trees, the chimneys, and here and there a window, of the old Hall. She looked at these all in turn, and then back to the low stone wall, with the red poppies growing in spare pieces of barren soil here and there, their roots wedged in between the piled stones.

And she suddenly burst into tears and kissed the poppies.

"I wonder if every maid loves 'em as I love 'em," she said,—*"loves everythin' what's out an' about—"*

the very bullocks, an' the cows, an' all the sheep, an' what can't fend for theirsels—an' hates the men folk, what worry the life out o' mun! 'Tis turble wicked! I be crazy, I b'lieve, like mun says I be. Livin' be cruel difficult. One minute 'tis all beautiful, an' the nextest 'tis dark an' wicked, an' I could kill them as is downtreadin' them as is weaker nor theirsels. An' what's the good o't all? Why, jus' nothin', nothin', nothin' all through!"

She dashed the tears from her wet lashes, and hastily picking a bunch of the poppies, she ran back along the hillside, crushing the yellow-eyed daisies under her nimble feet. The sheep-dog came bounding to meet her as she neared the yard gate. The cows were already standing round, for it was past their milking-time. She did not stay to drive them into the shippon, but entering the weather-beaten old house with its frowning front, she fetched a milk-pail from the dairy and began operations on the peaceful-eyed creatures, as they stood chewing their cuds, in the irregularly paved yard.

The rhythm of the milk falling in a soft shower into the empty pail was the only sound now in the quiet homestead.

She went to work steadily till the last cow was milked; then she threw open the yard gate, and the dog barked at the cows' patient heels, and soon the last one had filtered out, and the yard was empty.

And again she leaned on the rail and fell into a reverie.

Presently the clinking chains and heavy hoofs of the farm-horses came faintly down the lane. At the pond, covered with duckweed and shadowed by the flowering elderberry, they paused to drink.

The girl watched them idly ; then, as if suddenly recollecting, she picked up the brimming pails of milk, and passed with her burden into the house.

"Ees, that be it! that be it!" cried a voice at the doorway. "Zame as usual! Nothin' ready, nothin' thought on! Never a sip o' tea or a bite 'ave I 'ad sinth midday! That don't trouble 'ee, 'ee good-for-nothin' crazy crettur!"

It was Miah who spoke. Coarser and larger and redder than before, he stood threateningly over the girl.

"You think Grandfer ain't 'ere, so 'ee can speak as 'ee've a mind to! But 'ee can't!" she answered. "'Ee can speak so far as 'ee've a-spoke a'ready, but 'ee can't speak no farder! Tend the pigs, an' when the meal's a-served I'll tell 'ee!"

She indicated the door with an imperious movement of the head. The man's skin took a deeper red. He seemed about to speak, or even to strike ; but when he met her bold unflinching gaze, he only muttered a low curse, and went out to do as she had bidden him. He had hardly gone out when Grandfer came in—poor, infirm old man—and tottered-to into a chair near the door.

"Dish o' tay?" the girl asked, glancing at him over her shoulder.

The old man shook his head. He was so tired he could have cried. But the girl went on with her work and took no notice.

When the meal was ready she went to the door-step and called to Miah; then she turned and took the limp tired hands that lay with such touching weariness on the old man's knees, and held them firmly in her own. He seemed to gather strength, while she perceptibly paled.

"Now 'ee can tak' a sip o' tay," she said; and the old man looked up, with the grateful moisture in his eye, and answered with alacrity—

"Ay, I can zo! I can zo! Ees, fey I can! I've a-worked! My! 'tes amazin' the work I can püt een, an' me voour-score—eh, Miah?"

Miah laughed coarsely, and the light faded from the old man's eye.

A dangerous darkness gathered in the eye of the girl, and the man who had laughed shifted uneasily in his chair.

It was a sorry household for the girl to fend for—the rough coarse man, the frail old Grandfer, the youthful carter who gaped at her beauty. To her dawning womanhood the world seemed a dark and cruel place. Since her aunt's death there had been no one to teach the poor child the womanly acts of a woman. The floor of the dwelling-room re-

mained stained with mud and grease from one week's end to another. Only the plates and crocks and dishes were spotless. In her person scrupulously clean, she was yet sadly untidy : there would be holes in her stockings, for she knew not how to darn ; rents in her faded gown, for she knew not how to sew. The neck of her bodice would often be unfastened, leaving the white pillar of her throat bare to the sun and the rain. Yet her magnificent beauty surmounted it all : she was a queen, and the worst of men dared not touch her.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Temple rose on the morning after his decision to leave Upcott Hall, the sun had risen long before him. It shone in all its yellow strength full on the old farmhouse across the river. But it could not warm the cold grey walls, nor seem to put a breath of life about it. The place remained silent and motionless as the tomb.

He commenced breakfast alone, as was his custom—the master preferring to take his meals at irregular intervals.

One servant removed the dish-covers, a second handed him hot rolls, a third poured him out coffee; then they all three solemnly withdrew, and Temple ejaculated, "Praise heaven!"

These trappings of wealth oppressed him.

When the butler returned to give him more coffee, Temple inquired—

"When will Lord Frobisher be down, do you think?"

"Not before two o'clock, sir."

"H'm! I was thinking of leaving by the 2.30

express. That drives it rather close. You might mention it to him."

The old man left the room, and returned with the message that his master wished the departure deferred till the next day.

Temple was annoyed, but did not evince it.

"His lordship's not the thing to-day, sir," continued the old butler. "His night's rest was rumpled. He will take his meals alone to-day; but after dinner he would like to see you, if you please, sir, in the library."

"All right," said Temple.

"Pray heaven," he continued to himself as the man withdrew, "that this means I get off to-morrow! Six mortal weeks have I been here, and four of them spent on a cursed sofa staring at that old God-forsaken place over yonder, till it has burnt itself into my brain."

He sauntered through the window and down the velvet-turfed lawn, and, throwing himself under the shade of a spreading cedar, read away the idle hours of the morning.

Luncheon over, the lassitude that had still clung to him after his fever suddenly left him.

"A walk's the thing for me!" he cried. "Nothing like exercise for a man who has been filled with doctor's nostrums for four weeks!" and, whistling to the big retriever which lay guarding its master's dominions, he started off across the park.

Turning to the right, he followed the river for the best part of seven miles, by which time it had narrowed to a fresh-water stream, which he crossed.

Presently he came to a deep pool in a sequestered nook, and slipping off his clothes, he enjoyed a lazy swim among the reeds and water-rats. After that he continued his way refreshed, but passing a small inn he dropped in for a cup of tea. This the landlady supplied to him in a little garden arbour, together with cut-rounds, Devonshire cream, and home-made jam, for all of which he paid the modest sum of sixpence.

After the tea he lit his pipe, and lingered over it till the sun was beginning to make long, declining shadows.

Then he proceeded on his homeward way. It lay at the back of the hills that bordered the river. After pursuing it for several miles, it occurred to him that unless he left the main road and found a way for himself across the hills, he should be taken a good many miles out of his course.

So he turned from the road and began mounting the grassy hills, scrambling through hedges and vaulting gates, till at last he stood on the summit of the ridge.

He had timed his ascent well ; for there, opposite to him, embowered in woods, were the grey chimneys of the Hall ; and just beneath him, with its line of gnarled elm-trees, was—yes, the old

farmhouse he had tried on three other occasions "to strike."

He felt like a man in a dream as he chose the rough, stony path that led to it. A vague excitement, which he knew to be ridiculous, stirred in his veins as he pushed open the gate and entered the yard.

It was empty and deserted. Not even a dog bounded forward to resent his intrusion.

He advanced till he stood in the centre. Then he stopped, and turned slowly round, surveying everything.

There was not a sound nor a movement. Yet his eyes were irresistibly drawn in one direction—the direction of the shippon. Here at last, through a square hole, made in the wall in order that the dung may be cast out through it, his eyes fell upon the face he was destined never to forget. Its magnificent, scowling beauty repulsed him—yet he had to look.

He could think of nothing to say. How long he remained meeting the dark glance of the brilliant eyes he never knew. Then she disappeared, but only for an instant. She reappeared at the door, towering in her full beauty and haughtily regarding him.

"What be doin' of?" she asked.

Before he knew it, he had raised his hat—raised his hat to rags? raised his hat to beauty? To neither. He had raised it to the woman.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I am a stranger here. Can you tell me if I can reach the Hall this way?"

"How should I know?" she answered, with sudden passion. "What do I know, savin' when the light peeps 'tis day, an' when the moon shines 'tis night? 'Tis all dark here — dark!" She swept her hand with a tragic despair twice across her brow. Then, recovering herself, she answered, "You'd bes' ways go. I can't tell 'ee nothin'."

He did not want to go.

"Can you tell me the name of the farm?" he asked.

"Ees. 'Postle Varm'—that's what they calls mun."

"Can I get to the river from here?"

"Zome days," she answered.

"Some days?" he queried. "Why not all days?"

She smiled, but did not reply. Temple, meeting her eyes, smiled too. Since she had grown out of childhood, Cathie could not remember looking into any one's eyes and smiling, and it affected her. She put her hand against her heart and turned away.

She came back presently. Temple was still there.

"B'ain't 'ee gwin?" she asked.

"Presently," he answered. "Tell me, what did you mean by saying it was all dark here?" He touched his forehead as he spoke.

She knitted her brows, and tried to think.

Thinking, she walked across the yard, and leaned against the gate in her favourite attitude. Casting her eyes in dreamy forgetfulness over the sloping hill, the troubled look left her face. She had apparently forgotten query and querist.

Temple watched her, and something almost of awe came over him at the exceeding beauty of the picture.

Suddenly she raised herself, and stretching out both her hands, she cried—

“Oh, I want for know all about everythin’! Thiccy, an’ thiccy, an’ thiccy!” nodding her head in various directions. “An’ what be that up there above us,” sweeping her hand to indicate the blue canopy that overspread them. “It’s a-seemed to speak a time or two. Sometimes ’tis angered—sometimes ’tis soft—sometimes ’tis nought but ol’ rummage what saith nothing. What be it? That’s what I want for know. An’ where do the sun go when he rinneth hinder the hills? An’ what’s the wind? Where do ’e come from? Where do ’e go? What be they all? What’s everythin’? Who’s God? Where be us gwin to when us dies? Does us stay in the red earth, with the rain an’ the rummage up over us? Be that the end o’ us? Oh, ain’t there any one along all this hillside as can tell me the meanin’ o’ life an’ these ’ere strivin’s an’ pinin’s wi’in me?”

Temple was taken aback. Pity, which is so dangerously akin to love, beat at his heart.

"Poor girl!" he said. "Listen——"

But she blazed upon him a fire of anger from her splendid eyes.

"Poor!" she cried, with a scorn that made him feel as if he had suddenly shrunk to half his size. "Poor I be, be I? Go! You'm like the rest o' 'em, made so small 'ee can't see nobody what's a bit differ'nt to 'eeself but they'm 'poor crazed critturs'! What did 'ee come 'ere for? Go 'long with 'ee! I could mak' use o' a lot o' ugly names, but I won't. If it warn't for Miah, I might. But I ain't a-gwin for do nothin' Miah doth! You go 'long!"

She pointed to the river flowing peacefully at the base of the hills.

"I am very sorry" he said humbly. "I—you quite misunderstood. I——"

She interrupted him with an exclamation of impatience, and pointed once more to the river.

He hesitated only for an instant. Then, like the coarse rough men with whom she was thrown, he obeyed, and left her.

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CHAPTER XVII.

LORD FROBISHER stood in his library in his favourite attitude on the hearthrug. His heir had just withdrawn, having received commandment to remain at the Hall another fortnight.

The old man waited till he heard the chandelier jingle, and knew that Temple had gone to his own apartments, and there was no fear of his returning without first sending a servant to know if he would be willing to see him.

He tottered to his great easy-chair and sank into it. Seeing him thus, with every nerve and muscle relaxed, it was impossible to believe he had stood for half an hour conversing without show of weakness or fatigue.

The tension over, he now lay back in his chair exhausted ; and busily his mind ranged over the past.

He saw himself as Haswell Frobisher, young and dashing. The favourite of his uncle, he had not in those days scrupled to live beyond his means. He thought that the money would be his.



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The news of his uncle's death came to him just when the hole he had made for himself became a little uncomfortably tight. He and his brother went together to the funeral—he somewhat patronising the brother whom he had always in his heart depised. The will was read: he was not in it, save for a paltry legacy of two thousand pounds.

He could recall the shock even now—the wild effort to look unconcerned.

All his life he had lived in the hope of being rich. To retrieve his fortunes he married an heiress, squandered her money, and abandoned her. She died in poverty.

Just at this time his brother—Lord Frobisher—met with a severe coaching accident which, though not immediately fatal, left little hope of his ultimate recovery. In the ten years since his possession of his uncle's money he had remained single. Hope of riches regained lured Haswell into excesses. Fate had been cruel, but she was now about to retrieve her good name. The money would be his yet!

But Lord Frobisher, with one foot in the grave, suddenly decided to marry.

Haswell went down to the Hall to view the land. His brother had married his first and only love, so soon as she had become widowed, and now the joys of existence returned to him. Money and possessions had been nothing to him—this woman was all.

The doctors smiled, and whispered hopes of re-

covery. His beautiful wife nursed him with untiring devotion. Through the soft summer days they strolled in the park together, talking of the past that had separated them, and the wonderful present that had brought them together.

And Haswell Frobisher looked on and gnashed his teeth. Even if his brother did not recover, there were now—or would be shortly—two lives between him and the property.

Then he set himself to think.

In the early spring a child was born. Within a fortnight the mother died of scarlet fever, the origin of which was sought for in vain.

From that moment the widower's health failed rapidly. His interest in life was gone. The infant was only a painful reminder to him of his former happiness. The old physical troubles, that during the eighteen months of his marriage he had successfully combated, returned with redoubled force. After lingering a year in much pain and inexpressible anguish of mind, he died.

Haswell was summoned, and arrived on the day of the funeral. This time he had no hopeful anticipations when the household assembled for the reading of the will—a coldness, that had no apparent cause, having sprung up between him and his brother since the latter's widowhood.

The will was read.

Half his late brother's large fortune was left to him, and the remaining half he was to hold in

trust for the child; the whole to revert to him in the event of the child's death.

He remembered his start of petrified astonishment; then the pallor creeping to his face, and seeming to creep into his veins and into his very bones, to remain there chilling him while life lasted.

He recalled the features of the beautiful child as it played heedlessly with its nurse while the will was being read; his immediate determination to send it abroad; the subsequent news of its death, in which the whole county had joined in regret. His breathing became laboured as his mind dwelt upon these scenes now—across the long crooked vista of years.

Suddenly he tottered to his feet, and clenching one hand and shaking it towards heaven, while with the other he clung for support to the chair, he hissed out—

“Curse my money! curse my money! All the devils in hell are in that money! Curse it! curse it!”

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was one of those damp Devon days, when the atmosphere is too heavy to dispel the moisture, and it hangs over hill and valley like a shroud.

Temple, looking out on it all, wished himself well out of the county. As he stood discontentedly watching the river and the shrouded hill beyond, his eye was attracted by a female figure on the opposite bank. It passed to and fro, with its head bent as if in search of something.

"Supposing," thought Temple suddenly, "I rode into Upcott and hired a boat for the remainder of my time here? At least it would be something to do! I could row myself back. Yes; I'll do it!"

Consulting his watch, he found there was hardly time to fetch the boat before lunch. Besides, the tide was out. He must ride in after lunch.

At luncheon-time, happening to glance casually out of the window, he saw the same solitary figure still keeping up its dreary wandering up and down the river-bank.

His curiosity was awakened. He would fetch the boat and row to the opposite bank, and find out what she was doing.

Accordingly he rode into Upcott, chose one, and rowed back. As he neared the bend of the river which would bring him in sight of the old grey farm, he got quite consumed with curiosity to know if the same dreary female figure would be wandering to and fro, stooping to the ground, and wholly absorbed in some mysterious business along the edge of the river.

He was so near the wooded point now, that a couple of strong strokes brought the old farm full in view.

He paused and looked.

"Still there!" he exclaimed; and he rowed up close along the edge, and when he was within hailing distance he took the oars from the water and paused.

The figure was walking slowly towards him, but with head bent so low, he could not distinguish the features. She came almost alongside of him at last, and he called—

"May I ask what you are looking for? Ah! I thought as much!" he added to himself, as at the sound of his voice the features of the girl he had met at the farm on the previous evening were revealed to him.

"Have you lost anything?" he inquired.

She shook her head. He brought the boat up

close to the bank and threw out the anchor. Then, getting out, he walked towards her. She was once more busy pacing to and fro, with her eyes on the ground. Now and again she stooped and turned the wet grass aside with her hand, or moved a stone with the toe of her rough boot.

"You must have lost something, surely!" he said. "What is it?"

"Nothin'," she answered, without looking up.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Just lookin'!"

"Looking for what?"

"I dunno."

"Don't know what you are looking for!" he exclaimed.

"No," she answered, stopping in her search suddenly and looking at him. "Be that strange?"

"It struck me rather so at first," he answered.

Then he turned slowly towards the boat. What he could only suppose to be her clouded intellect, together with her great beauty, struck him as one of the most pathetic things he had ever known.

"Be gwin?" she inquired.

"I was thinking of it," he answered.

She looked at him wistfully.

"Tell me some'at," she said.

"What shall I tell you?"

"Just anythin', so long as 'tis what I aren't knowed afore."

He looked at a loss how to satisfy her.

"I know a lady," he said at last, "who would know exactly what to say to you ; but unfortunately she isn't here. She always says the right thing and does the right thing."

"My sakes!" exclaimed Cathie, "us never does up there," jerking her head in the direction of the farm.

"Never say and do the right thing?"

"No, never. I know us don't!"

A troubled look settled on her face. She brushed her brow with that impatient helpless gesture that had stirred his pity so powerfully on the previous evening.

"Would you like to see a photo of this lady who always does and says the right thing?"

Her lip curled, and she shook her head.

"Poor soul!" she said, turning away, "her must be mortal uninterestin'."

Temple did not hear. He was taking reverently from his breast coat-pocket a photograph, which he now held out to Cathie to look at.

She put out her hand to take it, but he drew the photo back a little way, involuntarily. Cathie saw it.

"I won't look nether!" she cried angrily. "What be feared on?"

"I beg your pardon," he answered, placing the photo in her hand. "I only thought——"

An exclamation from Cathie prevented his finishing the sentence.

"My! ain't 'er fine! Look to the jewels on 'er!"

an' the lace! an' the 'air of 'er 'ead all towered up like! Dear sakes! be that what womenfolks look like over where you be?"

"More or less," he answered, adding, with a lover's partiality, "But not quite so nice as that!"

"Looks, an' saith, an' doth mos' ways what 'er should! Well, 'ee can say what 'ee like, but there be a mortal sameness in it."

And without looking at him again she recommenced her search in the grey grass of the salt marsh.

Temple, who had been half disposed to be angry, laughed instead.

"There's anything but a sameness in her to me," he answered, as he turned with a quick stride to the boat.

"Say! look 'ee 'ere!" she called; "if 'ee come to-morrow, I'll a-show 'ee some'at!"

He nodded good-naturedly. He had not the slightest intention of going.

"Will 'ee come?" she called.

"Very likely."

"Answer up proper whether 'ee will or no, for certain!"

And Temple hesitated but an instant before he answered, "I'll come!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"LOVES me! Loves me not! Loves me! The daisy has told me the truth!" clasping her hands with a pretty glad gesture. "Why do we women act so foolishly? We run, every one of us, in books and out, to the daisy to tell us if he loves us, if he doesn't! And if the daisy says 'No,' we are quite depressed, though we won't admit it; and if the daisy says 'Yes,' we are in a transport of happiness! Why were we women made so foolish? Imagine a man doing it!"

Elsie was one of those women who still cling to the old superstition that man is a superior animal.

Nobody made any answer, for there was nobody there to do it. Elsie was soliloquising, as women in love are apt to do. The country lay warm in the sunshine; a brooding tenderness was on the hills.

The girl, who sat in an easy-chair under the shadow of a large magnolia, was not pretty in a literal sense of the word. People who flattered themselves they could discriminate to a nicety where female beauty was concerned, called her

"pretty-looking"; and perhaps they were not far wrong.

Her dress was fresh and cool, and a subtle delicacy hung about her like the perfume of a flower. She was innocent and guileless. Before everything else, one felt she must be shielded. In these days, when no one need be shielded, this gave her a very special charm, and even lent to her an element of originality which her character was far from possessing.

Men who had passed the first passion of their youth, and given all the ardour of their manhood to what was worthless, sought her company, and looked with dispassionate interest for the first signs of awakening love. But with that odd little crank in woman's nature that upsets all our most arduous calculations, instead of being humbly grateful, and accepting the first eligible offer, Elsie proved most difficult to please. Love did not awaken with that spontaneity the man-world had thought probable.

Major Clavers came out of the house and walked towards his daughter. Elsie, who was enjoying her reverie, was a little sorry to see him, but with a woman's hypocrisy she laid her hand on the chair next her own, saying—

"Sit down here, daddy."

Major Clavers was not an energetic man, and it took him some time to reach his daughter's side. When he got near enough to answer her without raising his voice, he said—

"All right, my dear, I will," and seated himself.

In his face there was no determination. The brow was a little troubled, the chin receding; kindness looked out of his eyes; the whole was redeemed from absolute weakness by a nose of some position.

"Mammy back yet?" he inquired.

But his daughter did not answer. A delicate colour had sprung into her face, and her father, following the direction of her eyes, saw Temple coming towards them across the lawn.

Elsie rose and put out her hand to him, and as he took it in a quick impulsive clasp, love was no longer hidden, but stood revealed.

Yet there was no open expression between them; Temple did not avow his love.

They loved each other. For the present that was joy enough for both.

CHAPTER XX.

It was August. The hot sun beat down on the ripe grain. Men and women alike turned out into the harvest-fields. The busy sound of the reaping-machine came from far and near, and the shouts of the men as the startled rabbits fled from the field echoed through the valleys.

Cathie, with her arms bare to the elbow, bound the rich sheaves with her nimble fingers.

Temple, who had returned to the Hall after an absence of some seven or eight months, rowed himself across the river, wooed there by the echoing voices and the yellow waving corn—burnished gold against the deep blue sky. He found his way into a corn-field where one solitary worker bent to bind the sheaves. She did not hear him approach, for the rustle of the full ears as she bound them with a deft turn of the wrist and flung the sheaf behind her covered the sound of his footfall.

It was Temple's shadow falling across the ears she was stooping to gather that caused her to

start slightly and raise herself. More than once since that first promise had his shadow fallen on her as she worked. Her eyes were on a level with his, and they both looked each into the other's, and neither spoke.

Then she smiled at him slowly.

It was a wonderful thing to see a smile dawn on Cathie's face. "It seems as if it came from a long way off—where angels are," Temple said to himself afterwards; and with that thought something quite new entered into his life, and entering, stayed there.

"I thought 'ee'd gone for zartain zure," she said, "an' 'ee wasn't never comin' back no more."

"I did go," he said, "the day after I saw you last."

"'Ave 'ee got the book o' picturs for me?" she asked.

"I forgot it!"

Her face fell.

"I will bring it over to-morrow," he said.

"Ees, bring mun over," she said eagerly. "I be gwin to larn lots from they picturs: I did from t'other book, 'ee know."

He was not listening particularly to her. His eye was glancing over her approvingly.

"I think you're tidier than you were," he said.

She hesitated.

"I didn't do it myself," she said wistfully. "Bessie Mollard, over to Stibb Varm, did it for me. I show her picturs, and 'er sew'th—see? But

er's a-seed all the picturs in the lastest book, an' er won't sew no more 'vore I show 'er 'nother."

"I will bring you another," he said. Then, "What are you looking at?"

"I be lookin' to your teeth."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They be so white."

"Well, that's what they should be. So are yours."

"They b'ain't so white as your'n, I don't believe. Grandfer's got one ol' snag a-lef', an' 'e be so yellor as a crow's foot."

"That's because he never cleans it, perhaps."

"In coorse 'e don't."

"Well, he should."

"'Ow do 'ee clean mun, then?" she asked with interest.

"With a tooth-brush."

"What be that like?"

"A little brush with a long handle. I'll bring you one if you like."

"For Grandfer?"

"No, for yourself."

"I should like to 'ave one—fey I should so!"

"All right," he said. "I'll bring you that and the book. I must be off now."

She nodded carelessly to him and stooped once more to her work. Temple watched her stretch out her shapely arms and gather the sheaf to her breast. It was a womanly task enough, after all,

he thought, though five minutes before he had told himself it was a sad pity she should work in the fields. But she lent a tender beauty to the action as she gathered the life-giving grain from the lap of Mother Earth and bound it into strength so that it might stand alone. She had already become emblematic to him of many things.

He turned away slowly.

"Zay!" she called to him after he had gone some distance; "'bout thickey tooth-brush—don't 'ee bring yer own, 'ee know, 'cos I shouldn' fancy 'e!"

As Temple rowed home across the river, he thought of this girl he had left toiling on the hillside binding sheaves beneath the burning sun. Her flashes of intelligence, her perfect form and features, awakened in him an intensity of pity which during his absence he had striven in vain to put from him.

He was no fool; he was no profligate. He knew the path he had chosen was a dangerous one. He knew now, certainly, that when an idle hour came to him it would find him rowing his way across the river. He had resisted the temptation at first; but, like all natures a little lacking in determination, the first little impetus from the other side sent him rolling like a stone down the hill at a breakneck pace.

The girl insisted. That was his excuse. She wanted to learn. Why should he not teach her?

But he was no hypocrite, not even to himself—that most fatal of all forms of hypocrisy—and as he stepped from the boat he said—

“If this girl were plain I should not want to teach her. As she is beautiful, I do. I am aware that though my visits at present give her pleasure, they must in the end bring her pain. She will have aspirations above her station ; and what is the use of cultivating tastes that people in her own class cannot appreciate? Still, the experiment is an interesting one, and, as I realise the dangers, the probability is I shall have the strength of mind to escape them.”

He strode back to the house, and loafed through the day with that idleness which is so fatal to an active disposition.

Of course, when he got into bed he could not sleep ; and when at length he managed to doze off, something woke him with a start, and he sat up in bed peering into the dark recesses of the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

"CATHIE!"

The voice was a very timid one. It hardly rose above a whisper.

"Cathie!"

A pig that lay in the manure-heap grunted. Beyond this there was no sign that a living thing had heard. It was not a romantic answer to a lover's tender call.

The young man, who was in the ordinary workaday clothes of a ploughboy, advanced to the door and rapped on it. Then, afraid of his own temerity, he backed hastily, tripped over an empty bucket, startled the pig, and fell into the warm pit she had with a terrified squeal vacated.

Cathie appeared at the door.

"What be doin' of?" she inquired, frowning.

"I thought mebbe, Cathie," he said humbly, as he picked himself up—"I thought mebbe, since you was lone-like——"

He stopped short, disconcerted at her forbidding

face and his own condition, with the straws from the manure-heap sticking to his coat and trousers.

"You look a beauty!" she said.

He looked down ruefully.

"Mebbe," he said, brightening—"mebbe, 'gainst I've a-claned myself——"

She uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, go 'long!" she said, and walked back into the kitchen.

There was something like moisture in the young man's pale blue eyes as he turned slowly away. He had missed another opportunity.

Cathie was busy inside the house.

A wonderful change for the better had come over the dwelling-room. The floor was swept and garnished, and a womanly neatness pervaded the place.

As she hung the house flannel out and placed it to dry in the sun, her nostrils dilated, and she thrust out her red under-lip.

"Bah! 'tis mucky work!" she exclaimed. "But I b'lave I've larned it now. I'll go over this evenin' an' call Bessie for see it. 'Er'll know whether it be right or no."

Accordingly, when she had set the men's supper ready, she ran out the back way, and hurrying over the fields with her beautiful strong young step, she reached in something over twenty minutes Bessie Mollard's home.

Creeping along the wall till she reached the back

entrance, she gave a low whistle—then waited. No one came, and she presently repeated the signal. She dared not go boldly forward and knock at the door, for had Mrs Mollard seen her, she would instantly have attributed every subsequent death on the farm, from a chicken upwards, to Cathie's presence on that particular evening.

At the repetition of the signal Bessie appeared at the door, glancing round with wide open eyes, in which terror distinctly found a place. She had grown into a pretty Devonshire lassie, with hardly sufficient character in her face to attract admirers strongly. Catching sight of Cathie, she nodded hurriedly and withdrew.

Activity at Stibb Farm, at this hour, was over for the day. The great kitchen was spotless from floor to ceiling. The dresser was filled with shining china from end to end. Underneath it stood the bell-metal skillet, "zo bright as a new zovereign," as the farm girl said when she polished it that Saturday and returned it proudly to its place. As for the drop-leaf table and the chairs, you could see your face in them.

Mrs Mollard was in the act of putting her youngest boy Johnny to bed, and was dragging him, an unwilling victim, to the tub.

Bessie came in softly, and passing rapidly across the kitchen, unhung her hat from the nail behind the door.

"Wheer be gwin?" inquired Mrs Mollard. "Come on now, Johnny, my dear, when I tell 'ee."

"Just out a bit, mother," said Bessie, trying to speak without betraying her excitement—for communication with Cathie was always exciting, because forbidden.

"Ees, d'rec'ly work be over, that's all you think on," said Mrs Mollard, relinquishing Johnny on the more urgent demands of the baby, who had just awakened in its cradle. "Go fetch the chil'—sharp now!" she cried, as Johnny's fat legs disappeared hastily in the direction of the mud pies he had been making in the yard.

"I want vor go out," said Bessie, the tears coming into her blue eyes.

"What's the matter wi' my little me-aid?" Mr Mollard's big jovial form filled the doorway, and Johnny, forgetting his mud pies, began to swarm up his gaitered legs.

"'Er wants vor go out! 'Er be always gaddin' round!" cried Mrs Mollard indignantly.

"Me-aids will be me-aids, do what us will wi' mun—eh, Bessie? Let 'er go 'long, mother."

"Ees, 'er can go 'long while I bide an' work!" cried Mrs Mollard, querulously.

"'Er time 'll come, mother—'er time 'll come."

"You properly spoil the me-aid. I can't 'ave Liza nether, 'er's busy wi' thr ironin'. Go 'long wi' 'ee, then! I'd be proper ashamed o' meself always trapesin' round. You'm eatin' all your white bread

now, sure enough!" Then, kissing the baby, "What's my little bööty want? Bless'n! zo 'e was!"

The baby showed its appreciation of this speech by slapping its mother's worn face. But she only kissed it the more rapturously and blessed it the more fondly. If there be a bit of good temper floating round a house, these lucky little people get it.

"Go 'long, my gal!" said Mr Mollard, nodding to Bessie. "I'll 'elp mother. Come along then, Johnny; zee if vather can vind wheer the 'ööks an' buttons be."

He lifted the little boy on his knee, and began fumbling about with his rough clumsy fingers.

Bessie, who had needed no second bidding to be gone, was hurrying over the hill towards 'Postle Farm. Cathie was waiting in a little hollow, and the two girls proceeded together.

"'Ave 'ee got picturs vor show me?" inquired Bessie eagerly.

"Ees; finer nor any us 'ave ad."

"Wheer do 'ee get mun from?"

"What's that si'nify?"

"Liza thinks 'ee witch mun in."

"'Ave 'ee told Liza? I an't got no patience with a little zaney like you be! I'll witch 'ee, sure'nough, if 'ee go blatherin'!"

Cathie had stopped, and was glaring down at Bessie, who cowered back from her.

"I won't tell 'er no more," she whimpered.

"I know 'ee won't: 'ee tongue'll rot in 'ee 'ead if ee do."

"'Twon't rot vor tellin' Liza, will't, Cathie?"

"'Twill if I've a mind for let it," said Cathie, who found her reputation for carrying the evil eye not unuseful at times.

"I ain't gwin no farder with 'ee!" said Bessie, stopping short. "You'm a cruel wicked maid!"

"No, I b'ain't," said Cathie, coaxingly drawing Bessie's arm through her own. "See! I'll tell 'ee some'at. 'Fore nextest Sunday 'ee'll 'ave a new 'at."

"'Ow do 'ee know?" cried Bessie.

"I knows."

"I mind when I was to school, 'ee telled me I'd get a drashin' 'vore day was out—an' I did, sure 'nough. But this what 'ee'm sayin' be proper. What be the colour o' the 'at, Cathie?"

"Oh, drat 'ee! I dunno—pink roses."

Bessie clasped her hands inapture, but her companion's quick pace had made her breathless, and she could ask no more questions as they ascended the hill.

"Be it pink roses, sure?" she inquired, the moment they stopped at the door of 'Postle Farm.

"You ask another question an' thickey 'at'll never rache 'ee," said Cathie, putting up a warning finger. Then she led the way upstairs and threw open a door to the right. It led into a large low room with two windows looking out on the hill-

side. A mass of nodding roses framed the landscape. A mahogany table, with a great pot of long-stalked phlox in the centre, stood between the windows. An old-fashioned arm-chair completed the furniture.

It is strange to think a charm should hang about such a room as this. Yet charm there undoubtedly was. Even Bessie stared a moment. Then she asked—

"Where be the bed to?"

"This be my bes' parlour," said Cathie, with a grand air. "I thought I'd jus' show it to 'ee."

She took one of the books from the table.

"Come 'long," she said, "in t'other room. I'll show 'ee this."

"Let's look to mun in 'ere," said Bessie.

"No; this be my room, an' I don't 'llow no one in it."

"But a parlour be always for company," objected Bessie.

"Ees, an' I keeps it for company," said Cathie, with a curious smile.

"What kind o' company?" asked Bessie. "No one comes along of 'ee barrin' me."

"I 'as my company for all that," said Cathie. "Ladies an' genellmen — real betterment folk — what's dressed finer nor any'ne you ever seed."

Bessie looked incredulous. "You be crazy, Cathie!" was all she said.

"Come 'long into my bedchamber," said Cathie

"an' jus' tell me what be wrong wi' un, then I'll show 'ee the picturs."

Bessie left the best parlour reluctantly. Once in the bedroom, she walked round it with a critical air.

"The jug did oughter stan' in the basin, in coorse!" she exclaimed, stopping in front of the wash-handstand.

"Well, put un in," said Cathie.

"An' the pillerses oughter be inside o' bed quilt."

"Put 'n in," said Cathie.

"An' these 'ere clothses didn't oughter be lyin' round. They oughter be in the chesties. Mother's got a cousin what lived lady's-maid up to the Hall 'fore Lady Frobisher died, an' 'er saith 'er was that nice-like, an' 'ad all the beautifullest things—silkses an' satins for 'er handkshers—an' all laces an' velvets an' sichlike stored away wi' lavender in great oak chesties what come to the fam'ly 'underds years ago."

"Lavender? What! same as is on bushes? Well, us needn't be great ladies 'fore us can 'ave that!" said Cathie, with scorn.

"No, but us can't 'ave the velvets an' laces an' oak chesties 'underds o' years in fam'ly."

"Grandfer's got a piece o' chinee downstairs wi' his great-grandfather's name on un. Mad' o' purpose!"

"Ees, I've seed mun; but that ain't same as velvets an' laces an' oak chesties."

Cathie did not dispute the point. "Be the chumber right?" she asked.

"Well, 'e oughter 'ave muslin cortains, 'ee know. Why," she exclaimed, "'ee've got a tooth-brush! Do 'ee use mun?"

"Coorse I does—reglar!" said Cathie.

"Basie Beer's a-got one too," remarked Bessie. "Vather says gin Xmas comes I shall 'ave one too. Do 'm lasty well?"

"Oh ees, I s'pose, 'ccordin'to," replied Cathie. "Come on now, an' I'll a-show 'ee the kitchen."

There were no faults of cleanliness to be found in the kitchen, and the inspection being over, Cathie said—

"Now 'ee can go an' look to the book, an' when 'ee've a-looked to mun 'ee can go 'ome."

"All right," said Bessie. "An, Cathie, be sure about they pink roses?"

The three men entering the kitchen at that moment, Cathie made no answer, and Bessie hastily disappeared.

Cathie remained in the kitchen until she heard Bessie leave the house. Then, while the men sat dozing by the fire, she crept upstairs, changed her frock, and entered her "bes' parlour." She sat down quietly for a moment or two; then rising, she stealthily drew from out an old oak chest a violin. She handled it tenderly, fingering the strings with a loving touch. Then, standing in

the centre of the room, she drew her bow across them and burst into a melody that grew faster and faster as she played, then softer and softer, and faded away into silence.

Cathie was not, of course, an accomplished player, but there was something strangely arresting in the power with which she handled the instrument.

She seated herself when she had finished, and laying down her violin and bow, remained for a few moments silent and with closed eyes. Then, dropping on her knees and raising her beautiful eyes to heaven, she cried in a low impassioned voice—

"Angels of light, come to me! If 'ee leave me, what be I for do? Raise me to some'at higher nor what I be. God hear me! Amen."

Her head sank forward on her breast, and she remained motionless. A broad silver band of moonlight swept through the curtainless window and played like purest thoughts about her. She opened her eyes suddenly, and sprang to her feet with a cry of ecstasy.

"Oh, Lord, 'ee've sent mun!" she said in an awestruck whisper, and dropping into her chair, she remained quietly seated, apparently watching the movements of people about the room. But though she turned her head sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another, sometimes faintly smiling, sometimes bending forward as if to catch the faintest sound, sometimes raising her head

upwards or shaking it with a little sigh, the strangest part was that through it all her eyes remained closed.

Her wonderful imagination peopled the room with airy forms and agitated the air with gentle words, which sometimes warned her and sometimes inspired her with hope, but always breathed to her of love and patient striving.

Poor "Crazy Cathie"! She had her wonderful moments of exaltation, the God-given compensation to a rich and beautiful nature cramped within unnatural limits.

For fully half an hour she remained in this transport of happiness; then her face suddenly fell. It was almost as if a light shining from within had been turned down.

"They be gone!" she said, opening her eyes and looking round the room. The moonlight streamed on the bare floor and unpapered walls. Cathie gave a profound sigh; then suddenly her face became again radiantly illuminated.

"Ah, but they've been!" she cried, clasping her hands. "I thought they'd gone for ever, an' my 'eart was broke. But they've been; an' though I can't see 'em now no more, I feels 'em. They telled me truly when they spoke o' God. He don't forget us, though He seem'th for hide His face a while."

That night, as Crazy Cathie lay on her white bed,

a painter might have died to give the radiance of her face, and be glad that even with his life he had bought it. For no one could look upon her as she slumbered and remain as vile as before; no one gazing upon her could believe that the body holds but a transient soul, and life—Immortal Life—is extinguished with the grave. The magnificent design of the Creator was written on the face of this woman, and no man looking down on her could doubt it. There was that on Crazy Cathie's face that gave the lie direct to the carking materialist, and opened for earth a sudden vista of heaven.

CHAPTER XXII.

As time passed Grandfer noticed the improved appearance of the dinner-table.

"Volks is got zo vine nowadays!" he said, with as close an approach to a grumble as he ever got. "Why, I can mind the time when mother 'd tak' a girt crock full o' tetties an' drow mun ins towzer aporn on's table; an' them as liked mixed tetties took an' mixed mun, 'long o' goat's milk—or butter-milk gin us 'ad it vor spare; an' them as liked mun as mun was, would tak' an' peel mun an' dip in's zalt an' eat mun. Us 'adn' no dishes, noor knives noor voorks; an' themmy zalt-zellar things—why, bless my zoul, us never thought on sichlike! an' what was good 'nough vor my mother's good 'nough for me, an' them as comes after me, I reckon."

He caught his breath with a sudden thought as he glanced at the girl, and he patted her shoulder as she came near him with a pile of plates.

"But you do as you'm a mind vor do, ma-deear," he said kindly, and he sank into a reverie. "Oh

Loord, Loord!" he muttered, with a heavy sigh, as he turned to his food.

"What be thinkin' on, Grandfer?" said Cathie.

He pulled himself together.

"Why, I was jus' a-thinkin' 'ow 'ard times used for be,—when us 'ad the barley bread wi' the girt long barley ears in't. Volks wasn't so nice-stomached then, bless 'ee! An' tay—bless my life, us couldn' 'ford no tay! Us picked organ, an' mad' organ tay. I mind, 'vore Annie were born, the missus took an' bought a ounce 'gainst the 'casion-like, an' kep' it in's cupboard under lock an' key. 'Twas a strugglin' time; an' I mind 'ow, the day after Annie were born, 'er zat up in's bed an' went to gloverin'. Theer warn't no machines in them days; 'er zewed mun wi' vinger an' thumb, an' got but shillin' the dozen, an' 'ad vor pay a 'oman penny a dozen vor carr' mun in to shop; zo theer warn't much profit in't. Why, wages was but six shillin' a-week, an' that wi' wheat a guinea a bag! Us 'ad to reckon, an' then go 'vore vor vang the wages; an' times I mind when theer warn't nothin' vor vang. 'Twas 'ard times, sure 'nough! Why, us 'ad vor zell 'alf the pig vor buy zalt vor zalt down t'other 'alf! Ees, us 'ad zo, zalt was that dear! Ah, ma-deear, they was times!"

"Then I dunno what 'ee'm grumblin' at now," said Cathie cheerfully.

"No, ma-deear, 'twas a slip o' tongue. I don't like vor zee 'ee put things 'vore in a un stomachable manner, don't go vor think I döy!" He glanced

round the kitchen. "I like vor zee 'ee 'ave't all natty-like — an' a bit grand-like too" — stroking the rough tablecloth with his fingers—"when ee've a mind vor't."

As over the dwelling-rooms of 'Postle Farm a change had come, so also had a change come over the face of the girl. Its dark lowering look was giving place to the earlier expression of her childhood. With knowledge, the darkness that had wrapped her mind after her accident proved itself no darkness at all, but merely obliteration of memory over a certain number of years. A great joy filled her heart as she recognised—with the opportunity of proving it—the strength and quickness of her brain. Her beauty gave her no pleasure, but her power to understand and to fix facts in her memory gave her a joy that was supreme.

For Temple came often now, in the guise of teacher.

"B'ain't I quick at larnin'?" she cried one day, after she had repeated all he had taught her. She clapped her hands like a child for joy. "I'll be a scholar yet, won' I?"

"Why do you want so much to learn?" he asked.

"Oh, I mus', I mus', I mus'!" she cried. "I want for know things! It's right inside me that I do! If 'ee killed the feelin', 'ee'd kill me—that's 'ow 'tis! I be jus' bound up wi' it!"

"But what good is it going to do you?"

She looked at him with scorn and a little disappointment.

"There! 'ee tak' all the love o' life straight out o' me. You'm foolish, that's what you be!" she finished, evidently finding relief in this statement.

"I didn't mean to be foolish."

"Couldn't 'elp o't, I s'pose," she said, with a resigned sigh.

"I don't see it was so very foolish," he answered, nettled. "After all, *what* use is it?"

"Oh, go 'long!" she answered angrily, then added, "If there ain't no use in it, why do 'ee come?"

He was silent.

"What be there things to larn on, if there b'ain't no manner o' use in knowin' of 'em?" she continued. "But there! I can't tak' no more pleasure in't!" she finished, looking with disheartened eyes across the sandy banks of the river.

"God forbid I should discourage you!" he cried impulsively.

"Oh, don' matter," she answered, moving slowly towards the farm.

"Don't take any notice of what I said!" he cried, stepping in front of her. "With a brain like yours you might attain to anything!"

She shook her head.

"I don' want no one to larn me an' think 'tis ol' foolishness. No," she continued, as if to herself, "you b'ain't the right un. Some one else, I s'pose, mus' larn me—for I be gwin for larn, 'ee know,"

she finished, raising her head with a fine determination, and turning her dark eyes full upon him.

He met them humbly.

"I made a mistake," he said ; "I see it now."

"No, no," she answered impatiently, "I mad' the mistake! 'Ee b'ain't the right 'un for teach me. I mus' larn o' some other body."

"No, you mustn't ; you must learn of me. I retract what I said. I believe good will come to you through knowledge."

"Zartain zure?" she asked wistfully.

"Zartain zure," he answered, smiling.

"'Ee know, I s'pose, I've a-got avil eye?"

"No, I didn't. But I'm not afraid of it."

"When I was a chil' they telled me I 'ad ; an' zure 'nough I 'ave. I knows it now. I've a-tried un."

"Whom did you try it on?"

"What odds be that to 'ee?"

"Well, don't try it on me," he answered, laughing.

"Coorse not!" she answered ; but she laughed a little wickedly.

"Shall I come to-morrow and teach you about the sun and the stars? You're always asking about them."

"Please 'ee self," she answered, passing up the hill.

Temple looked after her.

"Gracious, any way," he muttered, as he turned back to the boat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE Sunday afternoon Miah Sluman hung over the farm gate watching the sheep feeding contentedly on the hillside.

There was nothing in his dress to show the day—nothing in any part of the farm that seemed to point to it, except the farm-horses enjoying their weekly rest under a warm October sun, and making the best of it by having a thorough good feed, so far as the somewhat scanty pasture would allow of it.

Miah Sluman was thinking. His mind was cast on matrimony.

For five years he had been a lone widower. It was not tender memories of his deceased wife that had kept him so long from choosing another to take her place. When she first died he had had a dim notion of taking Cathie to himself, as soon as she should reach a marriageable age. But the girl's strong temper and indifferent domestic abilities had soon changed the current of his thoughts. He had remained single because, had

he chosen a wife, he would have had to pay for her board at the farm, or have moved elsewhere.

Lately, however, his old project had again come uppermost in his mind. Cathie was old enough now to be married, and her domestic abilities had improved conspicuously. Crazy she undoubtedly was, but not crazy enough to matter particularly; and as for the evil eye—well, he would risk that to inherit old Grandfer's savings.

For many weeks he had changed his rough humour towards her. He never complained now if the meals were not ready or the work not done. On market days, once or twice, he had even come back with a confection for her; and on one memorable occasion he had stood outside a draper's window fingering the shilling in his pocket for over half an hour before he could decide to part with it and bring her home a fairing. This fairing Cathie had promptly thrown behind the fire. She hated the man Miah with the whole force of her nature.

As he leant over the gate he pondered the matter over slowly and cautiously. When at length he turned towards the house his mind was made up. He would ask Cathie in marriage. First, however, he must win over Grandfer, for the old man had more influence over the girl than any one else had.

Grandfer was sitting by the fire, peacefully dozing, when Miah entered the kitchen. Miah sat down

with a great clatter, and the old man awoke with a start.

"I was just about thinkin' on Cathie," said Miah.

"Ha!" said Grandfer.

"'Er'll 'ave to be married shoortly, an' then what be us to do?"

"Time 'nough—time 'nough," said Grandfer.

"Us mus' 'ave a woman-volk vor mind the ple-ace."

"Ees, ees," said Grandfer uneasily.

"Betterways let the me-aid marry of me. The farm lease 'll come on 'er when 'ee'm dade an' buried; an' eef I marry 'er, zee, that'll zettle it all oop vine."

"'Er won't never marry," said the old man, whom the speech had evidently disturbed.

"'Er ain't no proper kin to me," continued Miah.

Grandfer looked up with a start.

"Us can go into Registry Orfice, an' no one wouldn' gainzay it—more 'special if us went over so var as Fammelsee. No one don' know nothin' 'bout us over theer."

"'Ow can 'ee zay 'er ain't no proper kin to 'ee, when 'ee know as 'ow 'ee wife was blood-related aunt to the me-aid?" inquired Grandfer. "What be talkin' 'bout? Be gwin vor get 'eeself clapped i' prison?"

"No one wouldn' know nothin' on't," said Miah, sulkily. "Us could go to Registry Orfice."

"No, no!" said Grandfer; "no kith an' kin o' mine but enter the church proper, an' 'as their

bannses a-hollied up in a proper manner. God sakes, man, what's my fam'ly comin' to?"

"Blow me eef I can zee aught disrespecktable in Registry Orfice!"

"Well, Registry Orfice or church don't mak' no manner o' differ'nce. The me-aid won't 'ave 'ee! Why, 'er'd scorn 'ee!" said the old man, with a fine scorn in his own voice.

"Scornful cats mus' eat rotten mice!" said Miah, disagreeably.

"'Er won't 'ave 'ee!" said Grandfer, stretching out his legs and trying to look as if he considered the question comfortably disposed of. It irritated Miah; his temper rose.

"By —, I'll mak' 'er!" he cried.

"'Er never won't," repeated Grandfer; "an' what's more, Miah, I don' mean 'er should!"

Miah leant forward and fixed his nasty narrow eyes on Grandfer.

"Look 'ee 'ere," he said, "'er'll 'ave for do't! 'Tain't no manner o' use vor 'ee to *object*—'er'll 'ave to come—zee? Thiccy me-aid 'll be mine avore month's out. 'Ee'd betterways answer oop, 'er shall, an' let 'er be married decent. When my mind's a-mad' oop, it tak's more 'n ol' dotty like you be vor turn 'n, zee?"

Grandfer began to tremble violently. He feared his son-in-law. He loved the girl. For the love of her, though his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, he raised his fist, exclaiming—

"Miah Sluman, while this tramblin' body keeps my zoul, the me-aid shan't go to 'ee wi' my consent. I'll keep 'er from 'arm while I draw my breath, zo 'elp me God Almighty!"

An ugly darkness settled on the younger man's face.

"You've a-give yer word," he said, rising; "now tak' the consequences o't!"

He moved towards the door.

"If 'ee 'arm of 'er," cried Grandfer, tottering to his feet and speaking with strong passion, "God Almighty blast an' curse 'ee!"

He tried to follow his son-in-law to the door, but his trembling limbs refused to carry him.

Meanwhile, far out on the lonely uplands of the farin Catherine wandered. And the October sun shone down on her ripe beauty, and she stretched out her beautiful arms and sobbed—

"Teach me the meanin' o' life! Oh, let me un'erstan' it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I'm getting tired of this place, Cocksey!"

The speaker was a good-looking girl of about twenty. She stood at the window of a picturesque cottage overlooking the river Teel. The rain, which descended in a light shower, gave a dreariness to a view that one could well imagine beautiful in fine weather.

Cocksey looked up with a start. "Oh dear! oh dear!" she said.

Any one having once seen Cocksey would not dream of asking why she was called Cocksey. She was a woman on the very shady side of thirty, and had the appearance of a worn-out old cock with its tail feathers gone.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" she said again. She had dropped her fancywork, and looked the very image of despair.

The girl looked at her, amused.

"I don't think, you know, this place altogether agrees with you. That's why I am leaving."

"Oh, my dear, pray, pray don't leave on my

account! I assure you, to me the place is quite a little haven of refuge. We've been here nearly six months now—six blessed, peaceful months! Oh! Madge, my dear, *don't* leave on my account! I assure you, no place ever agreed with me so well before."

"I'm sure it doesn't; you only think so. Your hair, I am certain, is redder since we came, and you've ever so many more freckles. No, Cocksey, we must move."

Cocksey sighed. "Since you say it," she said resignedly, and she took up her fancywork again, running on to herself as she did so—

"All the boxes—and the bills too. Ten large boxes—and those dreadful packages—the two dogs—the cat—the six kittens—and that awful monkey! All to move. Oh dear! oh dear! I dread it worse and worse each time. Madge, my dear, promise me one thing—you will get rid of some of the cats, so that we needn't pack them all? You see, it isn't only the packing—it's when we get to the new place—you know they never stay! Some one always lets them out just before they're used to the new grounds. Oh dear! moving would be nothing—I mean, comparatively speaking, nothing—if it weren't for the cats!"

"I'm quite prepared to take the risk."

"But, my dear, it's useless to talk like that. You know, I feel the responsibility so terribly! I must feel it, whatever you are kind enough

to say! My dear, are you quite sure you must move?"

"Yes; I've got an idea."

Cocksey groaned.

"I am going to farm. I am not going to be a lady farmer, but a real ordinary farmer: live in the kitchen, you know—wash my own clothes—drive into market—wear aprons—make the butter—milk my own cows——"

Here Cocksey's exclamations, which had been growing louder and louder, broke into a wail, and Madge had to stop in the middle of her catalogue.

"Don't you like the idea?" she asked.

"Every one gets worse!" said Cocksey. "What will all the people say?"

"I shan't ask them to say anything."

"But that's just when they say most."

"Now, Cocksey, haven't you lived with me ever since I began to learn spelling?"

Cocksey shook her head, but not in dissent. It was merely in melancholy remembrance of all she had suffered during that period.

"Well, you really ought to know by this time I don't care what people say. I never have."

"Oh, but you will!" cried Cocksey, rocking herself to and fro. "You will, some day—and then, perhaps, it'll be all too late. Oh, my dear! I feel so melancholy, pray, pray draw up the blind! Let us have all the light there is. These dark days are sadly depressing. Oh,

Madge, my dear, if you only could be like other people!"

"I'll try," said Madge.

"No, no! it wouldn't do either; you'd spoil yourself. Oh dear! ten large boxes—and all those packages—and the live stock! When's the move to be, my dear?"

"Oh, as soon as possible. I tell you what!" catching the companion by her arm; "it's wet—let's begin packing now!"

Madge's sudden freaks were a constant source of anxiety to Cocksey. But she now faced the inevitable as usual, and followed her charge from the room with a cheerful tripping step.

It was not until she had retired for the night that she wished for the hundred and twentieth time Madge would conquer the dislike she felt for her stepmother, and take up her proper position again in her old home at Fardwortly Court. But of this there was little hope. Sir Robert Montague was an affectionate father; but second wives exert a wonderful influence over their spouses, and the poor man had to see his son's visits grow fewer, and his daughter fly the house, without daring to offer a protest.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON the Sunday afternoon, when Miah started out in search of Cathie, he had to walk some considerable distance before his efforts were rewarded. At last he saw the girl's tall figure silhouetted against the sky as she walked along the edge of the hill.

He climbed up the hill along the side of the low stone wall. At the gate at the top they met face to face. They looked at each other a long while. Then the man's eyes dropped.

"What be after?" said Cathie.

"My dear," said Miah, in a wheedling tone, "I be after you! One way an' 'nother, 'ee know I be gettin' jus' maze over 'ee!"

Cathie threw back her head and laughed.

"Dear life!" she cried, "the zight these men volk think o' theirsels!"

"Don't 'ee anger me!" cried Miah. "By —, I'll mak' 'ee suffer for't if 'ee do!"

She looked at him a moment.

"Ees," she said, "'ee speak vine! But 'ee aren't

never 'armed me for all that—an 'ee never will!
'Ee dursn't!

She threw up her head proudly as she spoke.

"Dursn't I?" he snarled, and he caught her by the wrist.

She wrenched herself free. She was white.

"Miah Sluman," she said, "eef 'ee go vor clap 'ee 'and on me, 'twill be the avilest day 'ee ever zeed. I'll tell 'ee some'at more as I'm jus' on tellin'. 'Ee'll feel mighty queer when 'ee lie down to-night in wracksles o' pain. That'll teach 'ee kep' scarce o' me, I reckon."

Miah was a superstitious man. "What do 'ee mean?" he faltered.

"'Vore 'tis sunset 'ee'll know," she answered, turning towards the farm.

"A tricky avil-eyed witch 'ee be!" he muttered, and for the life of him he could not molest her any further, so strong and deep-rooted was his superstition.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"CATHIE, ma-deear," called Grandfer through the open kitchen door, "tak' 'vore the pigs wheer the oaks be. Theer be scores an' scores o' oak-masses theer. They'll pick up what'll zatisfy mun more nor 'underds o' other me-at. Drive mun 'vore, like a good me-aid, wull 'ee?"

"Drat they ol' pegsies!" muttered Cathie. She had intended meeting Temple, but the pigs would take her in the opposite direction.

But Cathie was fond of animals, no matter if it were only a grunting sow. When she threw open the doors of the several sties, and the pigs came out, some sedately and demurely, some with frisks and capers and squeals of youthful joy, she entered into their feelings with a ready sympathy.

"Bless mun!" she cried, as the smaller ones capered out of the yard with a frisk of their curly tails. "Mus' be vine vor un vor get out an' 'bout bit. Eef I was a-clemmed up in bit pigs-'ouse, 'twould come cruel 'ard; an' zo it do to they, I'll be bound!"

This marching with the pigs seriously delayed her, for they ran many times in the wrong direction. With happy laughter, and Shep to help her, she chased them back, forgetting for the time being her appointment with Temple.

When at last she greeted him, it was at an unpropitious moment. The little boat shooting across the river had more than once attracted Miah's attention, without its making any real impression on him, or arousing his suspicions. He noticed it riding on the tide now, and he stood still and watched.

When there was an appointment it was Temple's custom at this time to remain on the river-bank until Cathie walked before him to their trysting-place. This was always a sign that all was clear.

Miah stood watching, more out of idle curiosity than because he had any suspicions. Presently Cathie came back from her walk with the pigs, and as she stepped on to the open hillside the stranger began to mount the hill.

Then Cathie's quick eyes fell upon Miah, and she turned back abruptly. At the same moment the figure on the hillside paused, and after a moment's indecision returned to the boat.

Miah's slow brain could not at the moment catch the full significance of this; but he had sense enough to move forward as though he had observed nothing.

He jumped on to the butt, and with a "Get oop theer!" to Polly, rumbled out of sight. As soon as he had passed over the crest of the hill, he pulled the mare up, scrambled down, and stole stealthily forward under shadow of the hedge. When he came to a coign of vantage he paused. With his mouth gaping and his narrow eyes screwed up, he watched with bated breath.

Yes; it was as he expected.

Cathie presently appeared, and three minutes later she was joined by the other figure, and the two proceeded together till they were lost to sight in the shadow of the wood.

From that moment his eye was on them. Of course there were days when he was on a distant part of the farm; but whenever he was anywhere within range at all, his narrow eyes observed the river with a dogged persistence. At first his one idea was to tell Grandfer, and get Cathie into trouble. But he soon argued, what good would that do? No; he would hold his secret in readiness, so that he might some day, through it, force her into compliance with his own wishes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"TELL me, what do you think of all day?"

Temple asked the question of Cathie as they sat on the hillside one afternoon. He had never again spoken of the uselessness of her learning.

"I think o' a whole mine o' things," she answered.

"Do you ever think of me?" he asked.

"Times I do," she answered, looking at him archly. "Does that please 'ee?"

He felt the tables had been turned on him. He laughed.

"Well, yes ; to be quite candid, I think it does," he answered.

"'Tis queer of 'ee to tak' up wi' a maid like me," she said. "I s'pose I be so powerful ignorant, an' that amuses of 'ee."

"You delight and charm me," he answered, "because you are so full of simplicity and candour, and you have such charming fancies, and you are so marvellously anxious to learn. You love reading, you love music, you love the landscape, and

your old grandfather — things animate and inanimate; your heart is brimful of love. You are always saying and doing things that upset all my previous calculations. You are a woman to your very finger-tips, and you are very beautiful, Cathie."

"Be I?"

The praise of her character and her charms had pleased her, but, woman-like, the last assurance gave her the most pleasure of all. He exclaimed in surprise that he believed it had.

She laughed up at him.

"Beauty belong'th to a woman like," she said. "Same 'ee'd sooner 'ear me say as 'ow you was a proper man, nor you was this, that, an' t'other. 'Tis nat'ral like for man for tak' pleasure in 'is strength, an' a woman in 'er looks. Ain't that so?"

"It is," he answered, smiling into her eyes.

"An' I be beautiful?" she asked.

"You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen."

"What! I be? Do 'ee mean it—true?"

"I do."

"More beautiful," she asked, leaning a little towards him, "nor that pictur 'ee showed me in 'ee breast coat-pocket?"

Temple got up abruptly, and Cathie smiled to herself.

"Of course one always makes an exception of the woman one is going to marry," he answered.

"Be 'ee a-gwin for marry her you showed me in the pictur?"

"I hope to some day, if she will have me."

"An' 'er be more beautiful nor what I be?"

"Every man," he said, with a forced smile, "thinks the woman he loves more beautiful than any other."

"Does un?" said Cathie, interested. "That be nice for 'er an' nice for 'e, b'ain't it?"

"Very."

"An' 'ee think the lady in the pictur more beautiful nor me?"

"I did not say so," he answered.

"Fey 'ee did! 'Ee said 'ee was gwin for marry 'er, an' 'ee said as 'ow the woman a man loves be more beautiful to un nor any other. Now, be she more beautiful nor me?"

"You are different," he said. "I mean, you are a girl in a thousand. You, if you were in your right position, would be the belle of the season."

"The bell? My word! Should I 'ave for clip clap loud?"

"Not that sort of bell at all," he answered, frowning; "it's a French word—a stupid vulgar one."

"Then why do 'ee use mun?"

"To veil my meaning. I thought if I said 'the beauty of the season' I might make you conceited. I don't want to do that."

"Ay, but 'ee'd 'ave for think a powerful deal o' a

man 'fore 'ee'd heed what 'e said or feel any the more consequent for't. You needn't be afeared for speak out plain."

Then after a pause—

"So I be more beautiful nor what 'er be?"

He got up.

"What mak's 'ee so jumpsome? Sit still."

"You want to keep hearing the same thing over and over again."

"I reckon I be like mos' women volk in that."

He sat down again.

"B'ain't I? Now, 'ee've a-knowed a sight more maids nor me. Tell me now, b'ain't I like the rest o' 'em?"

"You are like no woman at all," he said.

Her face fell.

"B'ain't I like a woman at all?" she asked.

"You have gathered up more of nature than most women," he said, absently opening and closing the book he held. "You are not like any one single woman I ever met. You are like a great many of the best of them rolled into one."

She was evidently pleased with this. The corners of her mouth twitched; then she burst into a little peal of happy laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Temple.

"Oh, some'at," she answered.

"So I suppose—but what?"

"On a sight o' things."

She laughed again, — that happy irresistible

laugh that a woman tries to check by hiding her face in the coat of a pet animal or in the soft neck of a baby. It was irritating to be outside of it, because it sounded as if it must be so delightful to be within.

"I may as well go," said Temple, rising.

She leaned forward and looked up at him. Her eyes were sparkling.

"Be angered?" she asked.

"No," he answered, putting down his hands to hers to help her rise, "I'm not angry; but when you're in this mood you're maddening."

"Well, I won't be, then! You sit down an' read, an' I'll 'earken an' won't speak."

So he let go her hands, and threw himself on the ground beside her, and opening the book, began to read.

At the end of every paragraph he raised his eyes and met hers. It was not to him a complimentary meeting. She was looking right through him, oblivious of his presence, only hanging on the words that fell from his lips; and as, of course, they were not original words, his position was not one calculated to raise his self-esteem.

There came a day, however, when he raised his eyes from the book and found her looking far away across the hills.

"Cathie," he said, "you're not attending."

"Ees," she said, "I be."

He returned to the book, but on looking up again, her eyes were still afar off.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I'm just 'earkenin'."

"Well, why don't you look at me when you hearken?"

"Because I can come at it better nor when I do."

"Why? Am I distracting?"

"Bless my soul, you b'ain't distractin'!" she answered; "'tis the hills is 'elosome."

And ever afterwards it was to the hills she looked, and he chafed under it. It was worse than being looked right through as if he were glass.

One day she stopped him in his reading.

"Ah, I like thiccy!" she cried. "Loved 'er same though her dress were ol' 'nough an' she 'adn't no money."

"Dress and money don't make any difference where love is."

"'Twould to me. I should want the bestest I could 'ave. 'Tis always the same ol' story, b'ain't it?" she continued slowly. "The love o' man an' maid. An' the betterment folk reads it."

"Rather! He was our poet laureate—that is, the first poet in the land. 'Tis love makes the world go round, you know."

"Ees; I s'pose 'tis the spring in the cart, an' when 'tis broke goes mortal uneasy."

"Love comes in all manner of forms and shapes,"

he soliloquised. "There are no people in the whole world who affect us precisely in the same way. Even in a woman's love for her children, though she love them equally, she loves them in different ways. How wonderful, when one thinks of it, is that great gift of Love which suits itself to the person and meets us in a thousand different guises!—some of them so subtle in their difference that half of us patter through life unperceiving; just in the same way as the gradations of light and colour on the landscape pass unheeded by the eye that lacks the perception of beauty. Love has a thousand wings, a thousand eyes, a thousand sides."

Catherine laid her hand on his arm, and he turned to her.

"Don't 'ee forget," she said in a low voice, "however many starlings be in the flight, there's one a bit ahead, a bit the first. There's one as guides the lot o' mun!"

"Of course there is always one supreme love," he said.

"'Twould be powerful awkward if us mistook the wrong one. There's one love above all others one 'as to 'earken to, I reckon. Us may shove 'n off, but to the las' 'e comes back like a tired chil' to the mother's breas'—ain't that so?"

"What do you know about love?" he answered.

"What does a woman know about love?" she asked. "I reckon 'er was born wi' the alphabet o't, an' there's a plenty for spell it out."

"Cathie!" he cried, "don't throw yourself away. You could never be happy with one in your own station. You are so immeasurably above them, that marriage with one of them would only bring you pain. They would not understand you, dear—your life would be a wretched failure. Stay single all your life. Better the occasional companionship of some one who understands you—in a friendly happy way—than even the absorbing passion of a boor in your own class,—if they ever have absorbing passions, which I greatly doubt."

She looked at him straight.

"There be men in my class can love as faithful as men in your'n," she answered.

He uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Faithful love!" he cried. "That is not what a girl of your calibre wants. Understanding, friendship, sympathy—these are what you want, Cathie, and what in me you have. I will always be your friend."

"H'm," she said; and she paused a little.

"That does not satisfy you," and he uttered a profound sigh, and rose, pacing up and down the beaten path for a few minutes.

"I was trying to find out," he said, coming back at last, "whether what I said was disinterested or not. I thought perhaps I wanted too much for myself—you as my friend, Elsie as my wife. But, Cathie, the more I think, the more sure I feel that if you marry in the class to which you belong it

will be your moral ruin. You *couldn't* be happy! Besides, it's sacrilege. It's wicked to think of a rough ploughboy making love to you. It's horrible to think of his coarse beery kisses, and his obtuseness over all the hundred and one charms I love so well. For, Cathie, I do love you, as I feel I should have loved a sister, had I ever been so fortunate as to possess one."

"H'm," she said again. "Well, I'm a-gwin 'ome."

There was a little grimness round her mouth.

"I've offended you now," he said. "What have I said that you did not like?"

"Well, I'll tell 'ee. I don't like so much talk. I like more book-larnin'."

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly; "I'd no idea I was boring you." And he returned to the book. But she laid her hand over the page, and looking upwards at him, laughing, she asked, "Be angered?"

"No, dear, not a bit," he answered.

Then he looked at the beautiful face with the clear eyes dancing rays of swift soft intelligence into his own; at the lips parted.

He rose abruptly.

"I am going!" he said, thrusting the book into his pocket; and a moment later he was half-way down the hill.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next time Temple sat down on the hillside to read, he was careful not to talk.

For three-quarters of an hour Cathie listened intently. Then suddenly she said—

“’Ow ’ee do a-kep ’ee eyes clapped on thickey book!”

“Well,” he said, “last time you complained I talked too much, and neglected the ‘book-larnin’!”

“Theer now! Look to thickey, takin’ of me off! S’pose I was to tak’ ’ee off?” and she began to mince her words.

“You must not,” he said. “I love your Devonshire. I like you just as you are, Cathie.”

“Theer b’ain’t ’nough material for betterment, I s’pose?”

“There’s plenty of material,” he answered; “but the question is——”

He threw himself backwards on the grass, with his hands behind his head, and looked upwards at the blue sky.

"The question is——" he repeated.

"Ees?"

"Well, the question really is, Will this 'betterment,' as you call it, bring you happiness? Is it wise? I'm beginning to be afraid, Cathie, this friendship of ours is a mistake."

He did not dare look at her as he said this.

"So be I," she answered promptly. "I be mortal zick o't."

He sat up straight with astonishment.

"You are sick of it!" he exclaimed.

"Ees. B'ain't 'ee?"

"No," he answered, picking at the grass and throwing the blades away, "I'm not."

"Well, why be it a mistake, then?" she asked, after a pause.

"Oh! Well, of course all this reading puts new thoughts into your head — thoughts above the people with whom you are thrown — people of your own class. You're not, for instance, so satisfied with — Bill — isn't that his name? — as you were?"

"Ees, I be. An't mad' a 'apporth o' differ'nce."

"Then I am afraid our reading hasn't improved you much," he said drily.

"An't mad' a speck o' differ'nce," she repeated stolidly—"not a speck. I always thought un fit for a zaney; an' I think so same's ever!"

"You always had feelings above your station, you mean?"

"I mean what I say," she answered. "What you mean when you alter't up — that's your business, not mine."

"I believe you're right," he said slowly. "I believe you were born with these aspirations. It isn't," he continued, looking away, "as if I put them into your head."

"Bless 'ee life, no! You an't put nothin' theer."

"At the same time, in the end I *must* make you less fitted for the station to which you belong."

She raised her chin a little.

"I can b'long to what station I've a mind for," she answered. "If I eddycate meself, I can b'long to betterment volk."

"Oh, my dear girl, you can't!" he answered. "Don't be so absurd. You were born a rough farmer's daughter, and you'll stay a rough farmer's daughter."

She flushed.

He was sorry.

"I mean," he said, "you can't, don't you know? Well, of course blood does these things, not education."

She rose angrily from her seat in the grass.

"I telled 'ee I was mortal zick of 'ee—an' I be!" she said, as she turned towards the farm.

"You're taking my meaning quite wrongly," he said, springing after her. "Cathie!"

But she walked on.

"Oh, well, I can't help it," he said to himself, turning back. "It's better so."

The next minute he was at her side.

"Cathie, don't go away like this!"

"Well, I'll ask o' 'ee one thing," she said. "Be there anything wrong o' me, savin' eddycation?"

He thought a moment. He wanted to be quite candid. At last he said—

"No—I don't know that there is."

A flash of triumph shot from her dark eyes.

"Will you come back and let me read some more to you?" he said, quite humbly.

And they went back together.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MIAH was getting tired of waiting and watching, for nothing seemed to come of it. If he could only hear what they spoke about during those stolen interviews! Of course it was all courting, and the book was just a "turn off." Suppose they were already married? Why, then all his waiting and watching were for nothing.

"They b'ain't marr'ed, that's for zartain zure," he said to himself one day. "Nextest time I zees un smellin' round 'ere, I'll get zo's I 'ear zome'at—now I warrant I will!"

Accordingly, one day he made a pretence of going off with Grandfer to market; but, as soon as the cart had jogged out of sight, he got down, and crept back, and hid himself where he could get a good view of the river. What made the meetings easier to detect was that they were always made when the tide was in.

He was rewarded, after half an hour's waiting, by seeing the boat coming across. He shifted

his position then, and got where he could see into the yard.

Presently Temple entered. Miah gnashed his teeth when he saw how he was no stranger to the sheep-dog, who came leisurely forward and licked his hand. There must, then, have been many more meetings than he knew of.

"Well, 'ee've a-choosed a nice time vor mak' a visit, when all the men volk be out a-brooard!" he heard Cathie say.

"All the better that, isn't it?"

"All the better be't, when I've got varm an' 'ouse both to onct vor zee after?"

Temple smiled.

"I have seen you before under similar circumstances," he answered, "and it always struck me you left house and farm to see after itself."

She looked thoughtful for a moment.

"The women volk sloppy about zo; 'pears to me they b'ain't niver zatisfied, 'vore they watch the kettle boil, an' stan' over bread-pan vor zee the doughy rise. Now theers 'underds o' work does all zo well whether you'm by or no. Zend 'ee thoughts ahead o' 'ee, an' work's a-done wi' clap o' vingers!"

"Altogether, you've reduced your day's work to a science."

She frowned a little.

"That's right," she said, "mak' it up zo I can't vollow of 'ee. Then 'ee'm zatisfied. Oh, what a

thing 'tis I can't vollow the speech o' a plain-minded gent like you be!" she cried, with sudden passion. "Oh, if I could larn! if I could larn!"

Then they both passed out of earshot.

That night, as Miah sat in the kitchen waiting for Grandfer, who was late in returning, his pent-up impatience could endure no longer.

"You'm a middlin' me-aid," he opened fire with.

Cathie took not the faintest notice.

"S'pose I was to tell 'ee zome'at 'ee didn't know?"

"'Ee might try," responded Cathie.

Then he changed his tone.

"Cathie, ma-deear, I be mortal vond o' 'ee!"

She wheeled round upon him.

"I've a - telled 'ee afore," she retorted angrily, "vor 'old 'ee ol' blatherin' tongue. You ol' dustal, you!"

"Ees, I've 'eld it. But I can blather an' bring shame on 'ee if I choose. When 'ee go walkin' out 'long o' spindle-shanked gent, I s'pose ee've a notion nobody don't obsarve 'ee?"

For a moment the blood seemed to freeze within her. She only showed she had heard by a curious stillness. Then recovering, she turned to him with a light laugh—

"Mortal sharp 'ee think 'eeself, don't 'ee? 'Tain't no matter to me who zees un."

"What if I tell Grandfer?" sneered Miah.

"I can spare 'ee the trouble an' tell un myself."

Miah was taken aback.

"A likely tale."

"I will, then," said Cathie. "So soon as 'e comes in I'll tell'n."

"Oh, I dunno as 'ow I'd do that," said Miah. But he was so annoyed to find she cared very little, and that what he thought was a trump card was no trump card at all, that he slouched out to The Swan, where he got thoroughly drunk.

"'Er be zo slipp'ry as a eel, thiccy me-aid," he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XXX.

TEMPLE was no longer now in a desperate hurry to leave Upcott Hall. He remained so long as he felt himself welcome. The old ennui had given place to pleasurable anticipation. He never knew how his interview with Cathie would end: whether they would quarrel, whether they would leave each other with that exhilarating sense of *bonne camaraderie*, whether it would all be unsatisfactory or utterly delightful.

When he left Upcott Hall he no longer dreaded the letter that would summon him back. On the contrary, if it were long delayed he watched for it anxiously. The tables truly had been turned.

One afternoon in mid-May Temple, having gathered from the fact that for two days Lord Frobisher had not requested to see him his presence at Upcott Hall was no longer desired, rowed himself across the river to bid good-bye to Cathie.

It was one of those azure spring days when the soul of the season seems gathered into half-a-dozen hours. The daisies starred the hillside, and over the

mound made by the roots of a fallen tree the lambs frisked and gambolled.

He ascended the hill and hung a white signal from the farthest elm — Judas, the last of the "apostles." Then he walked towards the wood, and seating himself on a fragrant bank of primroses and violets, waited for Cathie.

She was not long. She came with a sweet gaiety on her face. The sheep-dog gambolled at her heels.

The moment her eye met Temple's she asked—

"What be the matter wi' 'ee?"

"Nothing," he answered.

She looked at him keenly for a moment.

"Well," she said, "an' what 've 'ee got for read to-day? Us 'ave a-finished t'other book, 'ee know."

"I know we have," said Temple, "and I'm afraid it's hardly worth while to begin another."

"Can't 'ee bide long?"

"Not very. Besides, I am going to-morrow; and, of course, I never know for how long it will be."

"Ah!"

"You would like me to leave you some books? I've brought some, and I shall catechise you well when I come back."

"What be un about? Just 'ee read a line or two."

He opened one of the books and began reading. But it was no use; he could not fix his attention. He threw the book aside.

"What is the use reading," he cried, with sudden

vehemence, "when one's heart is writing a life's history? At least, of course I don't mean that," he added; "but I'm just one of those fellows who get used to certain people, and then I hate parting with them. I am like a child with a favourite toy—homesick without it."

He looked across at her with half-smiling candour that was not without effort.

She answered the look with one of grave interest, almost as a large intelligent dog might watch a buzzing insect.

"Life comes cruel 'ard to 'ee, don't it?" she asked. "Seems to me as if 'e often wanted for do zome'at powerful good, an' couldn't. Ain't that so?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Seems to me," she continued, "'e often see a path straight ahead o' 'ee, an' 'ee'm minded for tak' un, an' 'ee can't."

Was she going to end by being the teacher and he the learner?

"That is true," he answered, accepting the situation—"too true—miserably true!"

"Well, 'ee mus' tak' it!" she said with decision.

"Ah, but it's so hard!" he answered. "For instance, it would be so hard to say good-bye to you now, under this cloudless sky and bright sunshine, and know I should never see you again, Cathie."

"So 'twould! an' wouldn' 'ave no manner o' meanin' nether!"

"It would have more meaning than you perhaps

are aware of. Man is so constituted that he cannot indulge in a really supreme friendship with any woman saving the one he intends to make his wife."

"No?" she said, and she looked him straight in the eyes.

"I've been rather foolish altogether," he continued. "I think our friendship has been a distinct mistake. For instance, now I have succeeded in teaching you a good deal—for you've been an apt pupil—but are you any the happier for it?"

"That be I!" she answered heartily.

"Ah, well," he said, rising, "I don't know that it has been very wise."

She rose too.

"These are the books," he said; "and if I do not come to claim them, they are yours."

She took them without speaking.

"Good-bye," he said. "I do not think I shall come again, Cathie."

"Good-bye," she answered, and passed on.

"Stop! let me carry them along the hillside for you."

He took the bundle of books, and they walked to the farm gate without speaking. Then she motioned him to put the books down, and leaning her back against the rough stone wall, she said—

"So 'ee b'ain't comin' back no more?"

He hesitated.

"Well," he said slowly, "I think not."

"I s'pose 'ee think 'tis bes'?"

"Yes," he said, "I think it best."

She looked at him with a half-mocking smile; then, nodding her head to him, she passed through the farm gate.

"Stop!" he cried for the second time; "I have an idea. Miss Clavers will be in this neighbourhood to-morrow. You know, Miss Clavers is the young lady I admire so much—the one I hope some day to make my wife. Shall I bring her up to see you?"

A dangerous light flashed in the girl's eye, and she wheeled round upon him. But her mood suddenly changed.

"Ay, do 'ee," she said, in her very softest accents.

Temple was charmed. What a harmless aspect it gave the whole affair! The thought of introducing his hoped-for bride to this wild young creature made the ground beneath his feet seem firm and solid rock.

"I will!" he cried. "Would you really like to see her?"

"I reckon I could do wi'out," she answered. "Howsomever, I reckon as 'ow 'er can't. Theer's a sight o' volk as come for clap eyes on me sinth the artist man a-painted my pictur."

"What artist man?" cried Temple.

"I dunno what 'e was a-called."

"How dared you let him!" cried Temple, forgetting himself. He felt furious. "You're not to do these things, do you hear?"

She dropped a demure curtsy.

"That's what I was a-larned to do when I was little maid," she said, turning up her apron and fingering the corner with mock nervousness. "To mak' a curtsy to the gentry an' zay, 'Ees, sir,' an' 'No, ma'am,'—an' go 'way arter, an' do all as I was a mind to. Bless 'ee, they b'laved it all! Thiccy curtsy pleases mun won'erful."

"You want to evade what I am saying," said Temple, on whose face her mockery brought no smile. "Won't you tell me who this artist was?"

His tone had changed.

"I couldn' tell 'ee what 'e was a-called," said Cathie, "for I dunno. I know 'e was fine an' tall an' straight, an' the pictur was for Lunnon. That's all I know about un. 'E never spoke, bless your life!—'e was won'erful kind o' closed up like. When pictur was a-finished 'e give me sovereign, an' that's the last I ever seed o' un."

"Is this the whole truth, Cathie?"

She was on the point of being indignant and angry, but when she met his eyes her own dropped.

"I never told 'ee no lie since I knowed 'ee first," she said.

There was a touch of emotion in the rich full tones of her voice, and on her half-averted face, with the downcast eyes.

"Cathie, I have told you before, and I tell you again," he said, with a strange drawn look on his face, "you are dear to me—I hold you as a friend

—I could not bear——” he stopped; his voice trembled; he was amazed, confused, uncertain.

“Cathie,” he said, “whatever the future brings, always remember my intentions towards you were sincere——”

The girl drew in her breath. One or two emotions crossed her beautiful face. Then, just as Grandfer’s shuffling step came over the yard, she cried beneath her breath—

“Ah, but I trust ‘ee!” and stretched out her hands to him.

He took them impulsively between his own, and, before he knew it, he had raised them to his lips.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"WHO was't 'ee was a-tellin' wi', ma-deear?" asked Grandfer, as Cathie came over the yard with a wonderfully soft light on her face.

"I dunno what 'e be a-called," she answered.

"Reel genelman—I zeed thiccy," said Grandfer, picking up the pigs' bucket and pouring the wash into the troughs. "'Ee might o' offered un a glass o' milk. Us a'n't much, but what us 've a-got volks is welcome to."

"I give un some'at more sperrety nor that," said Cathie to herself as she entered the kitchen; and she laughed softly.

That hand-clasp made an impression on Temple. Cathie's was a wonderfully strong and firm clasp; and yet it could be clinging too. Had there only been strength in it, it would not have suited Temple so well, for he had by no means too much strength himself, and a man does not care to own a woman is possessed with a superabundance of a manly virtue he feels himself a little lacking in. Cathie's clasp

had been clinging too, and this restored his self-esteem, for it showed there was something in him to lean on, after all.

It must not be imagined for a moment that Temple put this into clear thought as he strode down the hill. In the first warmth of our emotions we do not care to analyse them. That comes later on, when the first tender effulgence has faded. To do it at first would be like taking a hammer to break the stone of a peach just as we are enjoying its bloom and its fragrance. When we have eaten the peach, then we come quite naturally to the kernel. Temple postponed eating the peach, but he continued to enjoy the bloom and the fragrance.

He had often spoken to Elsie about Cathie; and he spoke again now, when he met Elsie after an absence of several months, and with the memory of Cathie's hands in his still very warm within him.

"Tell me more about her," said Elsie, when he paused.

They were sitting in the drawing-room of the hotel at which the Clavers were staying. The scent of violets came softly through the open window. The day was relaxing; to Temple it was even oppressive.

"Well," he said, "I don't know that there is much more to tell. Only, I always feel I want to tell you all about her. It is so horribly sad. What is one to do? What can one do?"

"Could she not be educated?"

Temple shrugged his shoulders.

"After all, what does that do for her? It only places her above her station. That is the worst of her—she is so miserably above her station. The outlook for her is utterly hopeless."

Elsie thought for a moment.

"I really think," she said, "it is one of those cases which is better left alone."

"I daresay you are right," said Temple.

"Don't you think so yourself?"

"Don't ask me!" he said, rising and beginning to pace the room. "I can't say! I don't know! It's horrible; and if inevitable, still more horrible. However," he continued, flinging himself on to the sofa beside her, "why should I trouble you with it? Do you know, it is four months since I saw you last."

"Is it so long?" said Elsie, though she knew quite well it was four months and three days.

"As to education," he continued, "she can read and write, of course, and she thoroughly enjoys Shakespeare."

A very distinct change came over Elsie's face. Temple was tracing the pattern of the carpet with the point of his toe, and did not observe it.

"You see a great deal of her?"

"Oh yes—whenever I can. I've taught her lots of things. No man ever had an apter pupil. Why, she actually——"

He stopped short. After all, what girl would

like the man who was paying attention to her to have the name of another girl constantly on his lips? What was coming over him? What would the end of it all be?

In vain that night Elsie assured herself it was no more than a kindly interest Temple took in poor crazy Cathie. She had to admit at last, with tears of shame, that she did not like it, and the last words poor Elsie uttered that night were—

“I hate her! I hate her! and I hate his being with her! Oh, I wish, if he loves me, he would tell me so! Why does he keep delaying? Surely, surely he must know I love him too?”

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was impossible for Temple not to notice a constraint in Elsie's manner the following morning, when he rode over to see her. He therefore at once made the suggestion he had already made to Cathie. Elsie's face lightened.

"I really should like your opinion of the girl," said Temple. "She is a curious temper, but I think I might venture to take you in under pretext of seeing the cows milked—or something in that way. You need not, of course, seem to observe her: be interested in the farming occupations."

"Madge Montague is going to take up farming."

"Whatever will she take up next?"

"She has left that sweet little cottage—fancy!—or at least she is going to leave it: but I interrupted you—what were you saying? Oh yes, about this girl. I should very much like to see her. Will you take me? You say she is beautiful?"

"Did I say she was beautiful? Yes, I suppose she would be generally considered so."

"Don't you consider her so?"

"Well, I've got so used to her face—I mean to say—not used to it, of course: but, honestly, I forget what my first impressions were."

"Well, if you will take me to see her, I will tell you what my first impressions are, shall I?"

"I wish you would."

So in the afternoon, the tide suiting, Temple rowed Elsie up from Upcott, and they walked together up the grassy hill that led to 'Postle Farm.

They proceeded to the door of the dwelling-room together. Temple rapped on it with his stick.

"Good afternoon," he said, in a fine offhand tone. "I have brought this lady to see the cowshed and the dairy, and so on, if you would be so good as to show them to us."

There was absolute silence. Back in the dark half of the kitchen, out of Elsie's view, though well within Temple's anxious range, Cathie stood defiant and stubborn. Very slowly she came forward, curiosity having got the better of her. She longed to see the woman of Temple's choice; angry emotions feared to find her more beautiful than herself.

She came forward scowling, and stood, at last, framed in the dark doorway, and for a background the whitewashed wall.

She stood a moment haughtily regarding the intruders.

"This is Miss Claver's," said Temple, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"'Er 'ee'm gwin for marry?" inquired Cathie.

"We can't always have things exactly as we wish," said Temple, not daring to look at Elsie, and wishing with all his soul he had not hazarded this visit.

To his intense relief he saw the expression of Cathie's face change slowly. It was not a change complimentary to his bride-elect; and he presently divined this. Cathie's expressive face, as she turned to him, said as plainly as words could—

"Think a sight of her, do you? Dress me in those clothes of hers, and — but there, she isn't worth thinking about!" Aloud she said demurely, "Please to come this way!"

She led the way to the shippon. It was ready for the cows: fresh straw scattered lightly for bedding; hay in the manger for food. On each pine post hung the iron chains to be fastened severally as necklaces round each fair lady's neck. They were bright as steel with the friction against the soft hairy skins of the animals, as they tossed up their horned heads to draw down the fragrant hay. Just where the rings ran on the pine posts the red-brown bark was rubbed off, and the plain deal shone out as if a french-polisher had been at work.

"How bright you keep the chains!" said Elsie, wishing to be appreciative, but strongly repulsed by the girl's powerful personality.

"Yes, miss, I does," said Cathie wickedly. "Tak's a sight o' time."

Temple wheeled round on her. He could have shaken her for making fun of his intended bride. But Cathie did not appear aware of his angry gaze. She only blinked mildly and meekly at Elsie, who stood holding up her dainty skirts and trying to evince an interest in farming occupations.

"I'm zure," continued Cathie, using the complaining tone of voice she always recollected as a child hearing from Mrs Mollard—"I'm zure 'gainst I be up mornin's an' veeded the pigs, an' milked the cows, an' let the covies zuck, an' tended the poultry, an' cooked the breaksus, an' washed o' Mondays, an' baked o' Fridays, an' carr'ed the men their nammock, an' mad' the butter, an' scoured the crocks, an' cleaned up 'ouse a bit, an' done my bit needlework, an' one thing an' 'nother, I be mos' dead 'gainst night-time comes along. 'Tis cruel 'ard work for a poor maid, all lonesome like—an' nothin', as may say, comin' in for't ne'ther!"

At the commencement of this whining oration Temple stared at Cathie in amazement. Doubt and perplexity succeeded—the recollection that she was called crazy—the dim wonder whether she really was. Then his impulse was to stop her peremptorily, but he felt he should get the worst of this. He became downright furious as he recognised she was making game of them both; but the next moment he was seized with an

irresistible desire to laugh. He moved away; he could not keep his features straight.

He heard Elsie saying good-afternoon, so he turned back to join them. He saw her slip a coin into Cathie's hand. He expected to see it come whizzing back in her face; instead he saw Cathie stooping to look on the ground.

"I thought mebbe," she said, "theer might be another sexpence as 'ad rolled in the muck!"

Elsie positively blushed with shame over Cathie's terrible rapacity.

"Oh!" she cried to Temple as soon as they were out of earshot, "she's something too dreadful! She's nothing but a complete humbug! I am sure of it. It's only money she wants, not learning."

"But she isn't like that, really," said Temple, beginning to burst with laughter; and then, mad with himself, he turned and shook his fist in the direction of the farmyard. "She's only—well—"

He stopped; he could not possibly explain. If he explained, the *entente* would seem unpleasantly familiar.

"You are too good to her," said Elsie. "You are entirely deceived in her, I feel quite sure. Now to me, really, she is as clear as glass. I can read right through her."

Temple felt a sudden irritation towards Elsie which frightened him.

"Oh, she's uncanny," he said. "Don't let's speak of her any more."

Elsie laughed softly ; but she said no more. Uncanny was the very last epithet she would have applied to Cathie.

When they had got into the boat, and the last of 'Postle Farm and Upcott Hall had disappeared round the bend of the river, she said—

"I have so much enjoyed this little trip. I know you feel disappointed about the girl—forgive me my candour ; but, do you know, I feel sure—I do indeed—that she is quite an impostor. Somehow I saw it all quite clearly. I felt it from the first moment she spoke."

Temple's lips twitched ; then he frowned. He would have given worlds to get away from Elsie just then. He was dissatisfied with the whole business. Elsie had shown to disadvantage ; Cathie had been maddening ; he himself was in a false position, while Elsie was placed in an unfair one. He would never go back to Cathie after this—he was too angry with her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

YET the next morning, when he left the Clavers, instead of taking his ticket to the north, as he had intended, he took a ticket back to Upcott. He was so angry with Cathie that he felt he could not rest till he had it out with her.

He climbed the hill late that evening as the sun was setting. Already the base of the hill and the river were in shadow. He paused at the farmyard gate, and looked down. The tide was out; a group of seagulls rested on the purple sand of the bend below the Hall. The little town of Upcott was silhouetted against the sky, veiled in a lavender haze, out of which the square church tower and the irregular roofs of the houses climbing up the hill stood dark and distinct. The beauty and the peace of it all entered into his soul.

"Shoosha-kee! shoosha-kee!"

The music of the farmyard pump made Temple turn his head rapidly. As he expected, Cathie was there. The sleeves of her cotton blouse were

rolled up above her elbows. She was standing with her back towards him.

He came nearer. The sparkling water streamed into the last bucket and overflowed. Cathie stooped to carry her burden across the yard. As she walked, her carriage was erect, but her head was bent to keep out the level rays of the sun from her eyes. The water in the buckets sluiced from side to side, falling in dimples and rising in miniature crests; and at every step a little wave washed over, now from one bucket, now from the other, leaving an avenue of glistening stars in her wake.

When within a yard of him, she put down the buckets with a clatter and looked at him. He knew then she had seen him from the first.

With a little comic twitching of the lips, she said—

“I thought ’ee said ’ee wasn’t gwin for come no more!”

“My only reason for coming now,” said Temple, severely, “is to tell you you had no business whatever to behave as you did yesterday. It put me in a false position, and it was unfair to my—to Miss Clavers.”

“Oh, go ’long!” she answered angrily. “O’ muzzle-pate you be!”

She took up the buckets again and passed into the house.

Now that he had made her angry, he wished he had not. After all, an Englishman’s house is his

castle, and he had invaded hers. He leant against the door; a sense of trouble was upon him.

Suddenly he asked—

“What did you do with the sixpence?”

Mischief flashed from her eye. Pausing in her task of laying the evening meal, she leaned her hands on the table, and bending towards him, whispered—

“He’s over ’gainst the shippon door, stuck in putty.”

A delightful sense of mutual amusement stirred Temple, but he controlled it. It was hideous for them to laugh together over Elsie.

The girl watched him closely. Now that he was not observing her, there was even a little timidity in her mien. A sense that she was fighting at that moment for all her life was worth, caused her breath to come unevenly. If only he would look up and join her laugh!

He looked up, but his eyes were grave.

“I wanted her to appreciate you,” he said.

“Why did you make a fool of me?”

“Not o’ you,” she said; and for the first time in all their intercourse the heart she had sought to imprison so closely leapt into her voice, and shone for one moment in her eyes.

He caught her hands in his. It was as if for one brief instant they rocked together over a yawning chasm. The next moment Cathie recovered her balance. Drawing her hands away, and still with

a suspicion of tenderness in her beautiful voice, she said—

"'Ee wouldn' deny me a bit o' frolic?"

The words that he would deny her nothing in all the wide world leapt to Temple's lips. With an effort he controlled them.

"Cathie, there is a bond between us," he said, while a whiteness settled on his face,—“a bond that I can't altogether define ; but it is a bond, and a strong one, and I like you to seem perfect to others as you seem to me ; and, in short, when I bring visitors to see you, you shouldn't make fun of them.”

She moved away.

"Shall I tell 'ee 'ow to stop it?" she asked, pausing with a large pan of scalded milk at the farther door.

"How?" he asked.

"Don't bring no more," she answered, passing out of sight.

She left a laugh behind her that echoed softly along the oak beams of the kitchen ceiling. Temple remained waiting for her return, but she did not come back.

"Cathie!" he called at last, "I am going."

There was no answer.

"I have to catch a train," he called.

Silence still.

He rapped twice at the farther door, and peeped in at the dairy. So cool and quiet it looked, with

its open window and half-closed shutter, and the green bank with pink ragged-robins just beyond.

"Cathie!" he called again ; but his voice echoed into silence.

He had the sense that she was somewhere at hand ; but not a sound came to him.

"Good-bye, dear," he said at last ; and he kissed his hand to the milk-pans and passed out.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THUNDER-CLOUDS had been threatening all day, making the task of saving the hay an anxious one. Though the sun appeared only at comparatively rare intervals, the breeze was fresh and strong, and the hay made with a rapidity that surprised even Grandfer, in spite of his experience running back over threescore years.

"I never zeed 'ay mak' quicker," he cried, as they sat for a brief spell under the hedge to take their mid-day meal. "Geeve's jus' a hummock o' bread an' a jug o' zyder, ma-deear," he added, turning to Cathie. "I mind one zummer us cut an' scatified an' carr'ed the vour-acre vield in dree days—that was the quickest I can mind. But that year was differ'nt; e'd a-been a dry year. Now this year the grass be amazin' zappy, an' 'twas zo wet as dung when us scatified 'ere yester mornin'; warn't it now, Bill? An' 'ere to-day 'tis vit vor car'y. Eef the thunder-clouds 'll but kape off, us'll be zo right as rain, an' get mun stacked vor nightvall. 'Tis a voxy day, tho'; but I pray the

Loord to kape it off a bit: all these 'ere labour drowed away mak's a cruel day o't. When I was young, a bit o' labour more'n less mad' no manner o' differ'nce like; an' now, 'pon my zoul, 'tis every pitchvoorkfull begrudged like!"

"Why don't 'ee eat," grumbled Miah. "'Ee a'n't got no tathe, an' it takks 'ee longer nor mos' volk, an' these 'ere jibber-jaw leaves 'ee 'underds behind 'and."

Grandfer swallowed something besides his cider before he murmured—

"Ees, ees; ees, ees!" and he did not speak again.

When evening fell the sun made a sudden warmth upon the landscape. It tinted the thunder-clouds into roses, and shone through a golden haze upon the river. It wrapped the shorn fields and the irregular haycocks, the carts, the labouring men, and, above all, the girl, in a beautiful soft golden radiance—half veiled, like a dream almost forgotten when the sleeper wakes, but exquisite still. The sound of the men's voices came clearly in the great stillness, for the wind had suddenly died away. The clinking of the harness, the rumbling of the carts, the straining effort of the horses as they mounted the hill, each and every sound, came clearly to Temple as he rowed on the river, trying to govern thoughts that would not be governed—to rule actions that would not be ruled.

Then he gave it up, and, flinging the anchor on to the bank, leapt from the boat and mounted the hill.

He was down at the Hall after an absence of some weeks. He had decided, during that interval, that whatever the bond between himself and Cathie might be defined as, it must be broken. He ascended the hill now for the purpose of telling her so, avoiding the hayfield by taking a circuitous route. There was, of course, no harm in his visits, but their purpose might be misconstrued.

He sauntered towards the place they had named the Bower, leaving a white signal hanging from the farthest elm tree. The sign of Judas this time was not a kiss, but a woman's kerchief.

The Bower had once been a small quarry; but it was disused now, and overgrown with thick foliage. Hundreds of such quarries are to be seen in Devon, where the strata of rock are rarely deep enough to permit the use of the same quarry for any lengthened period. In the bottom of this one was a little cleared space, half overgrown with moss. Here any one could sit free from observation, even were the wood above frequented—and rarely indeed did the foot of man pass that way. At most a sheep might bleat, caught in a bramble above, or a startled bird fly from her nest.

Temple made his way there, and waited. He had caught a glimpse of Cathie transfigured in the light of the setting sun, and every nerve he had re-

sponded to the sight. He was going to tell her he could come no more. How would she take it?

He waited for the best part of an hour; and so great had his excitement become that, in spite of his utmost effort, he could no longer sit still, but must pace the narrow spot feverishly to and fro.

Then at last came the sound of her swift foot-fall; the branches were thrust aside, and she stood before him, with the tenderness that lay always in her heart shining through her eyes.

And before he could stay himself his arms were round her, and he was kissing her with all the passion of his heart hers.

At first it was all rapture. All that stood between them was forgotten.

But suddenly it came back to him. He turned from her with a groan, and covered his face with his hands. The step he had been so sure he would not take, he had taken.

Marriage was impossible. He must turn and tell her so.

But when he turned, she was gone. He could not believe it. He called her; there was no answer. A terrible sense that she was gone from him irrevocably, settled on him like a heavy cloud.

"My darling, come back to me!" he cried, but there was no answer. The only sound that came to him, as he paused to listen, was the cooing of

the wood-pigeons in the great fir tree that threw its dark boughs over the thick growth of the quarry.

Man though he was, he flung himself on the ground and sobbed in his agony. He loved where love was impossible,—loved her madly. Separation was the only solution. Separation was bitter as death. Sin stared him in the face—and conquered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"It's this way," said Cathie. "If you was to ask me for marry of 'ee, I wouldn't—zee? I rinned away 'cause I wouldn't."

They were sitting in Cathie's best parlour. It was the first time Temple had ever entered it, and the pathos of her effort was like a voice crying within him. She had put on her best gown to meet him, but she was not awkward in it as most farm-girls would have been. She had entered the room with her own gracious dignity. She was not conscious of her clothes.

"But, Cathie," he said slowly, "if you wouldn't marry me—well, for the sake of argument, say you won't—still, dear, I should always love you; you would always be first with me. The only difference would be, the world would not know it."

She looked at him with a sudden cynicism on her face.

"Ah, but it's powerful needful that the world should know of't!" she answered.

"How do you *know* these things?" he exclaimed.

She smiled that curious smile she had once smiled on Bessie in that same room.

"You don't gainzay it, then?"

"I do gainsay it!" he cried vehemently, rising as he spoke and throwing himself on his knees beside her chair. "I do gainsay it! By all the man in me I gainsay it! I love you! I shall love you while life lasts. The world is neither here nor there!"

"Still, 'tain't ezac'ly wife 'ee mak' me," she said; and in spite of herself scorn flashed from eye and lip.

"You don't understand," he said, rising abruptly. "How should you? You don't understand my world."

"Nor don't want for," she answered. "I un'erstan' I be a maid as free an' glad as heaven to-day. If I listen to 'ee, I'll mak' myself so's I can drown myself down there in the river, glad enough for the mud an' the san' to wash over an' lay me out o' life." Her voice trembled with passion. "That's what 'ee'd mak' of me, is it? That's what 'ee call love in that damned world 'ee'm proud to speak on! Go; an' God's angels weigh your love! What is't, then, but rags an' filth an' vileness? Ah, God have mercy on me! 'tis a cruel sword-thrust!"

She had risen in her anger, but now she dropped into a chair, and the passion died out of her face. She looked at him with large mournful eyes,

"I that loved 'ee!" she faltered—"I that thought honour on 'ee!"

Every atom of blood had left his cheek. He came towards her.

"Cathie!" he cried, holding out his hands to her in pleading.

Her beautiful face trembled, her bosom heaved.

"Forgive me!" he faltered, dropping on his knees beside her. "Only forgive me! Be my wife."

"Is that God's truth?" she asked, trembling greatly.

"It is God's truth," he answered solemnly.



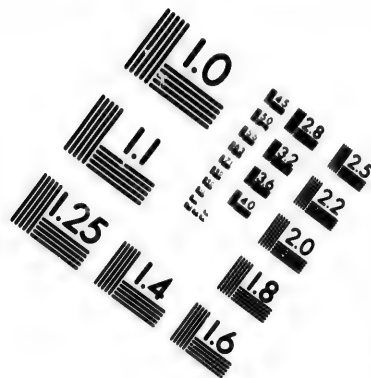
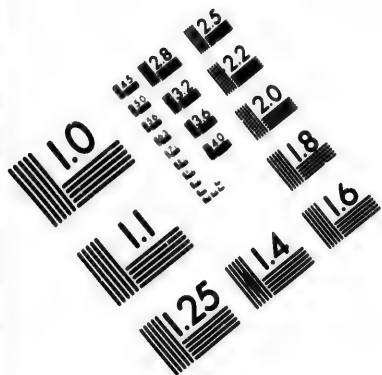
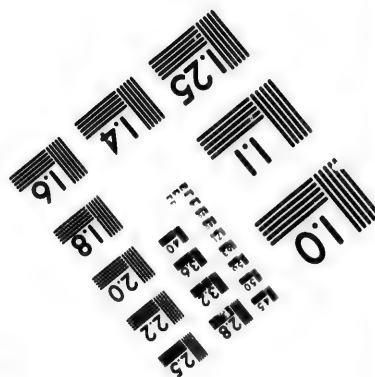
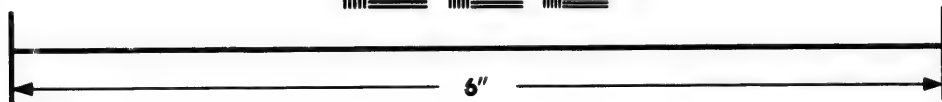
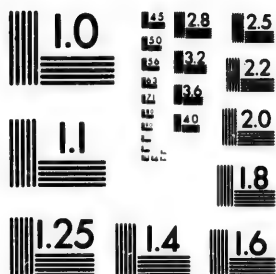


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CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERE was no sleep for Temple that night. He attempted none. Through the long hours he paced the room in quick excited thought, and when the day dawned he was still far from any decision.

He went to the window and looked across the river. The mist hung on the hills and half obscured the water. The trees stood out indistinct like dim giant shadows. The farm itself was invisible.

And as he looked, he felt there was no spot in all the earth like it, and Catherine the only woman in the world he desired to make his wife. He longed to go across and tell her so. The first fresh breath of dawn stirred the window curtains, and blew upon his face, and weighted his eyelids. Sleep had come to him suddenly, and he turned and threw himself on the couch, and a profound slumber fell upon him.

When he awoke, the sun was streaming across the room, and on all the broad wooded lands, on the river, on the line of hills across it, on the old grey farm. For one instant's flash he believed he had married Cathie, and with a sudden sick-

ness of despair he realised his folly. Then everything came back to him clearly. Three short hours' sleep had changed him from a passionate lover to a cold and calculating man of the world. He could not marry Cathie.

Of course he could not! He saw it all as clear as daylight now. Already he had advanced further with Elsie than a man of honour could retreat. He must explain to Cathie. After all, she was only a poor ignorant farm-girl; and though she could not be expected to understand, still no particular harm was done.

Of course he loved her. But he was not going to be quite such a fool as to wreck his whole prospects on that account. He could picture Lord Frobisher's expression if he brought in Cathie and introduced her to him as his bride-elect! Farewell, then, to the Upcott Hall estates!

And yet, how in the world was he going to tell Cathie? He shrank at the prospect—at the thought of her anger. It would make an end not only to love but to their friendship. When he came to consider that, he felt he could not lose her friendship. No, no! he valued it. He could not part with it. Catherine fitted into a nook that no other woman had ever occupied before, and never could again. He loved her! That was the appalling part of it all. He loved her madly! Yet how could he introduce her to the world as his wife? Could he have her educated? He had not the money. No; better leave

things as they were for the present. He would go on educating her himself. Any day old Frobisher might die; and then he would place her somewhere, where she could be fitted for the station which she was to occupy. In the meanwhile, however, nothing could be done. He could not part with her; he could not marry her. They would enjoy each other for the time being anyway, and not trouble just yet about the future.

He rowed himself across the river at an hour when he believed the men on the place would be out at work.

He had calculated rightly. No one was in the yard as he passed through. The gate clanging to behind him brought Cathie from the kitchen.

When she saw who it was, she half drew back with a shyness wholly new to him. The sense that the relationship between them was now for ever altered—that she belonged to him body and soul, and owned it in the sweet shy grace with which she greeted him—sent every nerve in his body tingling. She was his; and as he took her in his arms in the first mad joy of possession, he felt that until that moment he had never lived.

"I've been waitin' for 'ee," she said, and the tears were in her eyes. "Ah! do 'ee s'pose I be the girl for let the man I love lose hisself for me? 'Ee've got for say good-bye to me right 'ere—for I love 'ee too well to cumber 'ee with a rough farm-maid for wife! Ah! do 'ee s'pose I would? Do 'ee

think it for a moment? No, no! 'ee'm free as God's air! I'll never keep 'ee to the word 'ee spoke in passion!"

Her beautiful face so near his own, glowing with an emotion so worthy of her, stirred all the best that was in him. He recked nothing—all he wanted at that moment was her promise to be his wife. He desired her with his whole soul. Rather poverty with her, than all the riches of the world without her.

"Cathie," he cried, with strong emotion, "we belong to each other! With all that is best in me, I desire you! Don't be cruel, when we might be so happy!"

He whispered the last words with his cheek against hers.

She hesitated; she trembled. "I don't want for bring nothing on 'ee but good."

"You couldn't!"

"Afterwards 'ee might be sorry."

"I never should."

"'Ee might be 'shamed o' me."

"How could I be? There never was a more beautiful girl than you are."

"But when I ope' me mouth?"

"I'll teach you how to speak."

"Oh no, no, no!" she cried, moving back from him; "it wouldn't never do!"

"Well, let it pass for the present, then," said Temple. "We'll see how fast you learn."

"Well," she said, after a pause, "if I satisfy myself, I'll answer for't I'll satisfy 'ee too—for I be that mortal partic'lar. But till I be satisfied o' myself, I'll never, never marry 'ee!"

"But when I tell you that you satisfy me now, this moment?—that I don't want you different, but just as you are?"

"Oh, go 'long!" she answered. "Wheer's the use o' talkin' foolishness? 'Ow'd 'ee like for see me step out o' church door wi' 'ee, an' step into some grand big place, an' not know the names o' 'alf the things I seed theer, nor the uses o' mun! No, no! theer b'ain't no call for talk up foolishness. Us 'ave got a life to live, an' folks to meet. Us can't live a life up under a thimble."

"We could live in a little cottage and be happy as the day is long."

"Thiccy b'ain't my idea o' 'appiness. If I can't eddicate meself so as, pass where I might, folks 'ould never put a finger o' scorn on the place I sprung from, I'd never marry 'ee at all! Now, that's plain!"

"Who is going to be master, Cathie, you or I?" said Temple, smiling, as he drew her towards him.

"I tell 'ee what I've always yert tell," she said. "Courtin' days is bes'! When a man's in courtship, then 'tis 'elp 'ee over stile; but when 'ee'm married, 'tis stigged in mud an' never turn to 'ee! Whether there be truth in't or no, I couldn't tell 'ee, but I'll be master while I can, an' so mak' sure o' the fust

part. Ah! but bless 'ee life," she finished, looking up at him with a charming tenderness, "that be all my frolic! I tell 'ee I'd know nothin' better nor to do what 'ee asked of me, no matter what 'twas—but—well, I be queer—sometimes I know more nor I did ought 'cording to! There's some things I be just amazin' firm on, an' 'ee couldn' alter me in 'em no'ow. There's some'at comes to me when I be kind o' hesitatin'; an' this way seems bes', an' that way easier—they call me crazy, an' 'appen I be—but when that some'at comes an' tells me 'ardest road's the road for me to tak', do 'ee think 'ee could shaken me out o't?" She stood upright and looked at him almost defiantly. "No; you might break my bones an' tear out the 'eart o' me, but the very power o' heaven's on me, an' I won't budge. Ah!" she finished, "Miah saith there b'ain't no God! but leastways there's that as 'elps those as 'as never known a mother—an' 'appen could call no man by the name o' vather."

She was trembling with strong emotion.

As for Temple, he was awed. He felt in the presence of that which was better than himself. A wave of exaltation lifted him to a higher level. He kissed her with a passionate reverence, and he gave her his word as a man of honour, that never, no matter how strong his own feelings, would he seek to dissuade her from the path her highest instincts bade her follow.

BOOK III.

LINE UPON LINE, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IT happened one evening Madge had gone out to dinner, leaving Miss Scottie in sole possession of the picturesque little cottage overlooking the river Teel; for, as Madge had insisted on walking, the maid had gone to keep her company and give her protection, at Miss Scottie's earnest request.

Since they had started the wind had risen, and now blew in sudden gusts against the window-panes, bringing with it a deluging rain. Miss Scottie felt no anxiety. She was sure Madge would either be detained by her friends for the night or sent home in their carriage. So she sat before the fire, which the chill October night made welcome, and dozed peacefully in the intervals of her fancywork.

But a sound above the beating rain and angry wind caused her suddenly to sit up straight and listen.

It came again—a long, low tap at the door.

Miss Scottie was one of those superstitious people who never hear an unexpected sound but it immediately assumes a grave importance.

She waited and listened. Presently it came again. Then, summoning all her courage, she rose and opened wide the door, convinced she should find no one there. The October blast swept in rain and yellow leaves, and set the pictures swinging on the wall.

A girl with a shawl over her head stood outside, gazing at her with dark wide-open eyes.

Miss Scottie put out her hand and drew her in.

"Come in," she said, raising her thin voice above the storm. "It is a cruel night to be out in. Do you want shelter?"

She closed the door with difficulty, and turned to speak to her visitor; but the lamplight fell on a face of such singular beauty that for a moment she was rendered speechless. The girl had flung the shawl from her head, and her damp, dark hair clung in tendrils about her ears and brow. She was more than common tall. The magnificent moulding of her figure was outlined by the light above her. Her wonderful eyes shot out expressive glances. She stood as queens might stand, and Miss Scottie, remembering her greeting, said—

"I beg your pardon. It was dark. I could not see. Take this chair near the fire. You must be very wet."

The girl obeyed. Tears of compassion welled into Miss Scottie's eyes. Here was a high-born girl in the garb of a peasant. It could have but one interpretation.

"You want shelter," she said tremulously. "You need not ask it. You have it."

She put out her hand—the hand that no man had ever clasped or kissed—and took the girl's. Cathie smiled, that wonderful sudden smile of hers. Then she opened her mouth and spoke.

"I don't want vor no shalter," she said, the smooth broad Devonshire rolling off her tongue with the ease of custom. "I only want vor larn an' be a scholard."

Miss Scottie positively started. Nothing in the world could have surprised her more thoroughly. She had expected to hear the delicate speech of a well-bred girl.

"Who are you?" she cried. "Where do you come from?"

"Over to 'Postle Farm. I want for larn. You be the schoolmissus, I s'pose?"

"No, my dear, I'm not. Do you want to see the schoolmistress? Her cottage is on the other side of the schoolhouse. We are living in the old schoolhouse cottage. Did you never go to school? Can't you read or write?"

The girl smiled contemptuously.

"So can mos' folk, I s'pose. You can do more than that yourself, I reckon."

Miss Scottie murmured a diffident assent.

"An' why shouldn' I?"

"Oh, certainly, no reason," said Miss Scottie meekly.

Cathie sat quietly looking into the fire for a minute or two without speaking.

"Ees," she said at last, "I want for larn."

"Let me see," said Miss Scottie slowly. "How could it be managed? Are there no night-schools here, I wonder? I could, perhaps, have made some arrangement, but we are leaving shortly. My dearest girl, whose companion I am, is going to take a farm."

"What for, when 'er's a-got this?" said Cathie, looking round the cosy little room.

"Just for amusement. She's going to milk and make the butter herself."

"Lord sakes!" cried Cathie, bursting into a little peal of laughter. "Well, if that b'ain't a queer kind of amusement!"

"Yes, it's very queer, as you rightly say. Very queer. But then, my dearest girl is queer, but oh, so lovable! I am sure she would be so pleased for me to help you to find a teacher. She is the soul of kindness!"

"I don't want no charity," said Cathie proudly. "Grandfer's got money laid by in a stockin' up the chimney. What I want is for larn. Oh, if I could larn!" she cried, rising and clasping her hands. "If I could only larn for talk like gentlefolk, an' behave meself as sichlike!"

"So I'm sure you will, my dear!" cried Miss Scottie. "I am sure we can arrange something for you with kind Mrs Eliot, our schoolmistress, over

the way, I do not see, though you are grown-up, why you should not go to school, if you wish to. I will see Mrs Eliot and arrange it all for you, and then you must call in again."

"I do so want for larn!" said Cathie.

"The love of learning is a beautiful thing to be possessed of."

Cathie looked a little guilty.

"I always was for larnin' for larnin's sake; but there be a powerful reason of late as mak's me want for larn more partic'lar than ever. See, t'ain't only love of larnin' brought me straight away to 'ee; tho', mind 'ee, I did love larnin' when there waren't nothin' ahind o't!"

Miss Scottie nodded her head and smiled. She pictured to herself one of the superior artisan class asking this girl's hand in marriage, and she warmly admired her desire to be equal with him in education.

"I will see Mrs Eliot for you, she said, "and let you know."

Cathie rose.

"My dear, it's a dreadful night!"

"Mak's no manner o' differ'nce to me," replied Cathie, putting the shawl over her head once more.

"My dear, I can't let you go out till you have had a hot cup of cocoa or something to warm you."

"Us 'ave got plenty to 'Postle Farm. Us don't want for nothin'. I'm feared I've a-massed 'ee floor. Please t'excuse, an' many thanks for your offer o' 'elp—'tis won'erful kind o' 'ee, sure 'nough."

"Well now, come, let me fetch you a hot drink!"

"No, thankee, ma'am. Your kindness is the same."

She opened the door, and the whirling leaves danced into the room and the driving rain beat upon her face.

With a cheery "good night to 'ee!" she shut the door.

When Cathie reached home that night she knelt beside her humble bed and said, "God, who knows the 'earts o' maidens what wants for larn, Cathie thanks Thee, though 'er aren't got no fine words! Amen!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MISS SCOTTIE ran over to call on the schoolmistress the following morning immediately after breakfast. She was one of those diffident people cursed with an ungovernable impulsiveness that always leads them to make requests at the wrong time. The regular schoolmistress at Upcott had been ordered to the south of France for a thorough rest, and her place was being taken by a woman of gentle birth. Mrs Eliot was a niece of Lady Gamble's. The widow of a colonel, she had only been left fairly well provided for, but the greater part of her income she set aside for the education of her only child. As she had not much money to give to charity, she gave her services instead — a much severer test. The schoolmistress drew her salary and took her holiday at the same time, and Mrs Eliot supplied her place. Perhaps it was a good thing Colonel Eliot was deceased; for though he and his wife had been a devoted couple, he had somewhat restricted her sphere of usefulness. This post of village schoolmistress she certainly could not have filled had he

been living. She would, of course, have been occupied in ministering to his creature comforts, and fostering, after the manner of a tactful woman, the unbounded, if somewhat exacting, love and admiration he lavished upon her; while the poor consumptive schoolmistress would have struggled wearily forward to the inevitable end.

Being interrupted at the busiest time of the day is not calculated to make a person feel philanthropically disposed. You want leisure to realise the claims of other people.

As Miss Scottie tumbled out her history of Cathie with nervous diffidence and suppressed excitement, Mrs Eliot felt a growing annoyance. Surely, when she had voluntarily undertaken the whole school, Miss Scottie could have found time to do something for this girl without burdening *her* with the responsibility?

"My time is really so fully taken up," she said, "I do not think I could undertake anything further. Besides, very probably it is nothing but a freak of this girl's, and in a week or two she will be tired of it. There is no reason why a girl should not have an education nowadays in the natural way. I think it absurd for them to come back when they are grown up, expressing sorrow for missed opportunities. Opportunities don't come more than once as a rule, and people ought to know it."

Then, as she saw the gradual lengthening of Miss Scottie's eager face, she finished pleasantly—

"I am very sorry, Miss Scottie, but you see I could not put a great grown-up girl—you say she is quite grown up?—with a class of children; it would upset the whole class: besides, she would want individual attention. I really couldn't manage. You have no idea how hard I have to work to keep up with the Sixth Standard arithmetic!" she finished with a smile. "You will forgive my hurrying now? I have a class waiting."

"Why can't she teach the girl herself instead of troubling me with it?" was her thought as she returned to the schoolroom.

And yet she was a particularly kind and amiable woman, but it is a fact that other people's charities do not appeal to us. We want to be brought face to face with a situation and have our own particular sympathies stirred, before we can rouse ourselves to action. People can get as selfish and narrow-minded over their own pet charities quite as easily as they can over anything that never even had the ghost of a noble feeling to start it.

"She won't do it!" said poor Miss Scottie, sitting down the picture of abject despair.

"Won't do it?" cried Madge, looking up from a little watercolour sketch she was busy over. "How beastly of her! There, Cocksey, is *that* the right green? Too yellow now, isn't it?"

"Too yellow, as you say," murmured Cocksey absently. "So pretty too!"

"What! the yellow shade?"

"No, the poor farm-girl."

"Oh, bother that farm-girl! You haven't spoken two intelligent sentences since you saw her. It's horrid of Mrs Eliot, I think. Some people are so selfish!"

"Of course you know, Madge, my dear, I might find time perhaps to teach the poor thing; and if," began Miss Scottie, diffidently—"if, that is, you did not mind, and——"

"Mind! I should rather think I did! Why you'd always be with her when I wanted you with me! Besides, surely to goodness you've had teaching enough! It's your time to rest now."

"It's never time to rest when there's something to be done, as my poor father used to say."

"H'm; I thought it wasn't original."

"Life's a very serious thing and responsibility."

"Oh dear! I wish you wouldn't get religious," said Madge, throwing down her paint-brush. "It's something awful when you do. You'll be going to these revival meetings over the way before you're done!"

"My dear!" said Miss Scottie, drawing herself up, "I'm nothing if I'm not a churchwoman."

"Then you ought to see the church school is the place for farm-girls to learn."

"Yes, I do see that; but you see, dear Mrs Eliot——"

"Oh, 'dear Mrs Eliot' is like all the rest of them, —do anything for her own pleasure and nothing for anybody else's!"

"Mrs Eliot is a dear, kind woman," said Cocksey. "I suppose, my dear, you wouldn't consent to the girl coming here every night and letting me do what I can for her?"

"Certainly not."

In spite of herself Miss Scottie felt relieved.

"What does the girl want with learning as long as she can read and write, and milk the cows and feed the pigs? Really, I have no patience with those stuck-up idiots who want to play the piano and be ladies! Look here, Cocksey, nothing would make me consent to your victimising yourself!"

Miss Scottie, as she went slowly upstairs to take off her hat, wiped away two furtive tears.

"Youth is very hard!" she murmured.

And yet in her heart of hearts she was glad to be quit of the trouble.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GLAD until Cathie called for her answer. She went trembling to Madge.

"My dear, what *shall* I say? She's come."

Madge, who was not very dignified, got up on tiptoe and peeped through a chink in the door. Then she came back to Miss Scottie, and whispered—

"Isn't she handsome!"

Again she stole forward for another peep, returning to say—

"Magnificent eyes!"

Then back again, to return with—

"Not like a farm-girl at all."

And Cocksey stood with finger on lip and the moisture gathering in her pale eyes, because the sympathy of her "dearest girl" was being enlisted without any interference from her.

Madge came back at last for the final time, and whispered—

"Go in and talk to her. I'll listen,"

Miss Scottie went in without having taken the precaution to ask what she should say.

Cathie did not answer Miss Scottie's "Good evening." She sprang to the subject at once.

"Be I gwin vor larn?"

At the eager questioning of the beautiful eyes Miss Scottie's fell. She hesitated.

"I'll ask my dearest girl," she faltered.

And through the half-open door Madge's head was thrust nodding vehemently—

"Yes, yes, yes!"

CHAPTER XL.

TEMPLE'S visit to Upcott Hall was only a short one. The day soon came when he had to climb the hill and say good-bye to the beautiful girl who had given her heart to him.

Temple's feelings as he strode away from her would be difficult to analyse. As for hers, it felt to her as if half her life had gone with him.

There was nothing, however, in the expression of her face to attract the attention of the men amongst whom she moved. She prepared their dinner, and as soon as she had emptied the steaming potatoes into a large dish in the centre of the table she withdrew.

At the door she met Miah.

"Come back an' stay a bit wi' us, Cathie, my gal," he said in a wheedling tone.

"Mebbe I would if there was anythin' for tempt me. But men folk I can't a-bear. Driv'th me mazed for sit an' 'ear mun mounchin'.

She passed out and across the fields.

Once on the hills, she lingered till late in the afternoon. When she returned she did her milk-

ing, put the kitchen straight, and set a cold supper for the men. Then her day's work was ended.

Although a light rain had begun, she could not remain within the house. A painful sense of uncertainty clouded her future; a fearful sense of oppression, over and above, and altogether separate from, her feeling of loss in Temple's withdrawal.

Over at Stibb Farm, Bessie, too, was experiencing all that her small soul could, in the way of fluttering emotions.

After burning the dinner, and omitting to put any water with the potatoes she had been told to boil, she passed the afternoon in tears. Towards evening she took her hat from the peg, and moved towards the door with a furtive glance at her mother.

"Wheer be gwin, Bessie?" inquired Mrs Mollard.

"I can't stir what 'ee'm askin', 'Wheer be gwin?'" said Bessie pettishly. "I be gwin out for a breath o' fresh air."

"Why, it be rainin', chil'!" said Mrs Mollard. "An' whose for milkey? Tom's away wi' the steers."

"I'll do't when I come back," said Bessie.

"I should like for know what would 'appen if I put off this, that, an' t'other for please meself?" grumbled Mrs Mollard. "Do 'ee s'pose——"

But Bessie was gone. She ran rapidly along the edge of the hillside till she came to the lane down which the carts passed to 'Postle Farm. She had not long to wait. Presently came the rumbling of heavy wheels, and Miah came in view. He had been doing some carting for Mr Mollard, and for

the past week he had returned from work at the same time.

"Whoa!" he cried to his horse when he came alongside of Bessie, who was making a pretence of picking flowers in the hedge. "Why, ma-deear, 'ee'm lookin' up so pink as a little blush rose!"

Bessie grew a little pinker at the compliment.

"'Pon me soul, since I seed 'ee last," continued Miah, "I ain't thought upon nothin' else. I be that took up about 'ee, Bessie, 'tis amazin'!"

"Oh, Mr Sluman, 'ee be so much older nor what I be, I can't for the life o' me think what 'tis 'e can find so pleasuresome in a me-aid like I be!"

"Why, my dear, look to yer beauty! Come, now, an' give me a kiss!"

"Oh, no!" said Bessie, "mother wouldn't like it!"

"Mother won't never know, ma-deear!"

"Oh, but, Mr Sluman, I don't care for be kissed hinder 'edges—don't seem proper for a maid."

"Ma-deear, you jus' let me geeve 'ee a kiss, an' you'll find 'tis proper 'nough! Why, I'll be bound no man's ever kissed 'ee, now 'ave 'em? Boys, when they play 'Kiss in the Ring,' belike—but no man what loves 'ee warm, my little dear, like I do! Come, now, an' 'ee'll see 'ee'll like it proper!"

He had drawn near to her, when a step behind caused them both to start guiltily aside. Crazy Cathie was coming towards them. Her lowering gaze was fixed steadily on Miah. Miah slouched off, and Bessie turned homewards.

Cathie hastened her steps and overtook her.

"You middlin' little fool!" she cried. "What be doin' with a drunken ol' varmint like Miah be? I live in's 'ouse wi' un, an' I know un!"

"Mr Sluman's always very kind to me," said Bessie, "an' you've no call for spake so spiteful."

"Go 'long, you little fool! I'd like for shak' the life out o' 'ee! Honest maids don't go trapesin' round lanes wi' great old drunkards! I tell 'ee now plain, 'e be the blackest villain when a woman's tied to un as ever I seed. 'Aven't I seed my own aunt quak' wi' fear for un? I tell 'ee plain, when 'ee comes 'ome in one o' they mazy fits o' drink, a woman goes in fear o' 'er life wi' un!"

"You'm not buried yet, anyways," said Bessie, tossing her head, and pleased with this feeble answer.

Cathie smiled.

"I b'ain't marr'ed to un!" she said. "I kep' un in's place wi' the avil eye. I mak' un mind 'isself! An' I say this, God 'elp the woman 'e gets the maister 'and of! She'll drag 'erself to's grave, as my aunt a-done!"

"Oh, ees," said Bessie, "you can speak up very fine! P'raps you want un for yerself? I seed 'ee walkin' with a gentleman a month or two agone. P'raps you can't spare me a honest man!"

Cathie looked at her with withering scorn; then her face turned very pale, and she passed on, for she had no answer to make.

CHAPTER XLI.

ONE fine evening in December Cathie started off to Upcott, as she had done regularly every night since Miss Scottie had first undertaken to teach her. No matter what the weather was, she always presented herself punctually at the old schoolhouse.

This evening she was starting rather late, and her pace for the first quarter of a mile was hurried. Then she suddenly pulled herself up short.

"You'm a wicked maid!" she exclaimed aloud, and turned back the way she had come.

When she re-entered the kitchen Miah was lolling across the table nodding over a newspaper. Grandfer was sitting by the fire, his fingers twitching convulsively over the arms of his chair.

"I be bit poo'ly!" he said, looking up as the girl came towards him—"bit poo'ly! I b'ain't sure but what death's a-took me!"

"Time 'e did tak' the ol' varmint!" said Miah to himself, while he cast a glittering eye on the girl.

"What's matter with 'ee?" asked Cathie, leaning over him gently. "Be painsome?"

"Naw," he answered slowly, and rolling his head from one side to the other. "Naw—not painsome 'zactly, but I be mortal uneasy. 'Ave 'ee got a texty for zay?"

"I can't a-mind one now," said Cathie. Then she looked up suddenly. "Grandfer," she said, "theer's some one anigh 'ee 'oldin' of 'ee tremblin' 'ands."

The old man heaved a deep sigh. The painful restlessness left him. He sank back in his chair and slept.

And there came to the girl, as if borne on music sweeter than the harp,

"Had you not stayed, I must have fled!"

"Ah!" she cried, looking upwards and apparently addressing the air, "'twas 'ee then a-tuggin' at me heartstrings till I couldn' go no farder, but mus' come back!"

"Crazy crittur!" muttered Miah, "spakin' up to nothin'! Who ever yert tell o' such a thing?"

Cathie remained kneeling by the old man's chair till fatigue forced her to slip into a sitting posture; and presently she too slept.

CHAPTER XLII.

"CATHERINE has not been for a whole week," said Miss Scottie. "I cannot understand it."

"She's such fun too!" said Madge, looking up with a yawn. "I declare I quite miss her."

"Sarah tells me she has the reputation of being a witch."

Madge laughed.

"Well, my dear, there are strange and unaccountable things in the world. Some say she is crazy."

"Well, we can contradict that, any way," said Madge. "There's Laury calling."

Laury was Mrs Eliot's little boy. He had taken a violent fancy to Madge, and had asked as an especial treat to spend the day and night with her.

"Madge," said Laury, rather too closely on the top of his prayers to be termed exactly devout, "Sarah says Cathie's got the avil eye."

"So have I—two."

"What is the avil eye?"

"An eye that wherever it looks brings disease and death."

"But yours doesn't."

"It does as much as Catherine's."

"Sarah says Cathie's got avil eye; she knows it for a fact."

"Sarah's an idiot."

"But Sarah says every one says she has. I do hope Cathie won't cast the avil eye on my rabbits!"

Madge burst out laughing, but Miss Scottie cried—

"Oh, my precious boy, don't think of such a thing! It is not possible. No one has the power to harm either you or your rabbits!"

The little boy gave a sigh.

"What a nice world it would be if they hadn't!" was all he said as he settled himself to sleep.

Madge laughed again.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Miss Scottie, "you don't take the world seriously enough!"

"You take it seriously enough for us both, dear old Cocksey!" replied Madge, and putting her arm round her waist and blowing a kiss to the boy, she led Cocksey downstairs.

"Joking apart, though," she continued, as they took their seats on either side of the fireplace, "I can be very serious when I like. I want to know what all this information you are cramming into Cathie is going to do for her?"

"The child wants to learn, my dear. But I won't say I'm not troubled with the same question. She wants to learn, and I feel somehow God's in it, and I must teach her."

"You're sure it isn't just that you love teaching?" said Madge silyly.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Cocksey, too inexpressibly shocked for further words.

"Have you been thinking?" said Madge presently. "Our lease is up here in a month, and we haven't the ghost of a notion where to go!"

"Oh, dear! I thought perhaps you were thinking better of it, and were going to remain on."

"I can't. The agent told me to-day the cottage is re-let."

Cocksey sat looking the picture of despair.

"I've been making inquiries everywhere," said Madge, "but they say there isn't a ghost of a chance till Lady Day!"

"What! not till March? What is to become of all the animals?"

"Well, we shall have to turn in somewhere else and out again."

Cocksey groaned.

"My dear," she said, gathering up her work, "don't let's talk of it to-night, or I shan't sleep. Either we must play Patience, or I must go straight to bed!"

"Patience for preference!" said Madge, hastily fetching the cards.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON Sunday evening Bessie Mollard slipped away from Stibb Farm without being observed.

She ran out across the fields in the direction of 'Postle Farm. She wanted to ask Cathie a question. She was not afraid Cathie would bear her any ill-will for allowing Miah's attention. Cathie never bore ill-will, though in her moments of sudden passion Bessie feared her.

But when Bessie reached 'Postle Farm, Cathie could not stay to speak to her: her grandfather was ill; she thought he was dying.

Bessie was so much excited at the news of such an interesting event, that she ran back to her mother's, exclaiming breathlessly as she entered the kitchen—

"Oh, mother, only think! Grandfer to 'Postle Varm's a-dying!"

"Who telled 'ee?" cried Mrs Mollard, pausing in her task of laying the evening meal.

"Cathie telled me just this minute when I was over theer!"

"Over theer!" cried Mrs Mollard. 'Over theer! Now only look to it if the pigs don't die What did 'ee want for go over theer for? I dunno what be a-comin' to 'ee. Yer never 'tend to what I tell 'ee I telled 'ee only this forenoon for 'tend the flower-nats, an' 'tain't done! You'm gettin' so fast an' so swing an' so hairy, there b'ain't no doin' nothin' with 'ee!"

Bessie took off her hat and threw it on the sofa, annoyed that her exciting news had fallen flat because her tongue had slipped.

"Now put 'e away!" cried Mrs Mollard. "I thought when you was born I'd 'ave a comfort in 'ee! But 'tis spiteful wickedness with 'ee all day long!"

Mr Mollard entered the kitchen at this moment, and Bessie ran to him.

"Vather, only think! Grandfer to 'Postle Varm's a-dyin'!"

"Dyin' be 'e? Now theer'll be ructions! That theer Miah 'll be for marryin' o' the maid; an' what can a poor crazy like 'er be do?"

Bessie flushed scarlet and tossed her head.

"Mr Sluman don't 'old wi' crazy maids like Cathie be! 'E likes 'em differ'nt!" she muttered.

"Grandfer was a quiet some neighbour," said Mr Mollard, seating himself and beginning to unlace his heavy boots. "I'm sorry for 'ear he's nigh 'is end. Decent, respectable, 'ard-workin' man 'e was; but 'avin' no women-folk to fend for 'n drove un back-

'ards. I mind the time when 'e used to tak' a score o' pounds o' butter to market reg'lar. Ol' Mrs Tythycott was a honest, 'ard-workin' body. 'Twas a evil day when he lost 'er. Annie weren't no sort or kind o' use, poor soul; an' as for the maid, I mind when 'er comed up from Plymouth, after 'er vather was drowned, 'er was an amazin' pretty little me-aid—an' Grandfer 'e was clean mazed over 'er. Queer 'er shüdd o' gone crazed like; but I b'lieve Grandfer dotes on 'er same as ever! Well, I be sorry for 'ear poor ol' man's gwin! Bes' ways go over, mother, an' len' a han'!"

Mrs Mollard turned round upon her husband.

"You listen now, Bob, if you please! I've 'ad the avil eye on me wunst, an' I don't put myself in's way o't again, never no more! Look to they pigs us lost! As fine a litter as ever I seed, an' as careful a sow as ever farried—an' what did 'er do? Why, 'er squat four of 'em—'er as never squatted one in 'er life afore! An' what happened to the nine as was lef'? Didn' fits tak' two of un? An' wasn' the third so weakly us 'ad to do away wi' un? That a-left us six; an' when they was comin' nigh market-time, didn' one o' un fall in water-butt seven o'clock o' Sunday night, when we was all to chapel, an' drowned herself? That was five—four of 'em us sold, an' the fifth us couldn' fatten, do what us would wi' un! 'Ave 'ee forgot it? If 'ee 'ave, I aren't! An' I tell 'ee straight I b'ain't gwin! Theer's Basie, too, gala-wantin' over theer jus' as us a-cast the spell an'

bring'th un back again! Mind me now if 'er aren't! I b'ain't no vuool! I knows wheer the Davil be, an' I avides un! Them volks as 'as got a villum over t'eyes o' un can please theirsels! But to ask me for go where avil eye is, I won't do't; an' if Grandfer can't die easy wi'out me, 'e mus' die 'ard, for I b'ain't a-gwin nigh un, not though the judgment-day clapped 'isself right down on the top o' me for't—so theer!"

"Easy, easy, 'oman, wi' yer tongue," said Mr Mollard gently.

Mrs Mollard, as was her wont after an excitement of this sort, sat down and, throwing her apron over her head, began to cry.

"I'm sure," she sobbed, "no one can't say I wouldn't be neighbourly wheer I could! But I've my chil'ern for think on; an' o' coorse, Bob, if 'ee wish it, 'ee know I aren't gainsayed 'ee nothin'. I 'opes I knows the Book wheer the 'oman be ordained to submection. Whatever 'ee've telled me, Bob, I've always a-done it. I mind thickey 'oman as 'ad a canster in 'er stomick, I went 'fore an' tended same as if it 'ad a-been my own chil'! 'Ee can't deny, Bob, what I've always a-done my part!"

"Ma-deear," said Mr Mollard, turning his eyes in the direction of the supper-table. "I never denied nothin'! What've 'ee got vor zupper?"

He sat down imperturbably good-humoured. His wife's long oration was no more to him than the happy twitter of swallows in the eaves. Indeed he

would have missed her volubility had she suddenly become a silent woman.

The family gathered round the table—the rosy-cheeked boys, the blue-eyed Bessie; while the crowing baby danced in its mother's tired arms. She looked with proud eyes as she saw the plentiful plates passed round, and back again for second helpings.

“Don’ ’em eat!” she said to her husband. “Johnny’s got a master appetite!”

“Basie’s all zo big ’cordin’ to!” said Mr Mollard, cramming his mouth with a large forkful of toad-in-the-hole.

“Ees; I was the same when I was a me-aid, an’ now ’tis only pickin’ at ol’ rummagy stuff what b’ain’t no use to one’s in’ards like.”

“Tak’ a jug o’ beer; that’ll vetch ’ee appetite!” said Mr Mollard, handing her his tankard.

“I don’ never like for tak’ sperit an’ sichlike; but mebbe ’tis presumptuous, zo I’ll tak’ a drop!” said Mrs Mollard, raising her husband’s tankard and sipping a little.

“Pshaw!” he cried. “’Tain’t no manner o’ use, ’oman, for go smellin’ of’t! Drink it down proper. I shall ’ave to drench ’ee wi’t, like us did ol’ ‘Wild-a-go’ las’ winter!”

He made a feint of doing it, at which all the children clapped their hands and laughed uproariously.

“Now, now, ma-deears!” said Mr Mollard.

"You'm gettin' above yerselves! You'm makkin' noise 'nough for scare the pigs! I've a-finished now, mother. Give me the babby, an' ate a bit yerself!"

He rose from the table and seated himself by the fire, where he lit his evening pipe, and dandled his baby, while the March wind rose outside and shook the casement. But within was Peace and Plenty and Contentment.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DIFFERENT was the interior of 'Postle Farm.

In the kitchen the man Miah sat counting his chickens before they were hatched.

Upstairs Grandfer lay, leaving the chicken he had hatched through long years of toil.

By his side sat his granddaughter, holding his feeble hands, till her own life was drawn out, and her teeth chattered with the cold.

The March wind blew, and howled, and whistled.

"'Tis a - most as if 'twas waitin' for carr' un off!" his granddaughter said beneath her breath, as a sudden blast, louder and fiercer than the last, threatened to blow the window in. "As if 'twas a-howlin' for'n, an' was that impatienable, couldn' wait no longer."

The rattling of the casement roused the old man.

"I've a-got some'at partic'lar for zay, Cathie, ma-deear," he said in a low voice, and speaking at long intervals. "Go now 'fore to chimneypiece an' tak' out one o' they 'inder bricks—'ee know I never

would let 'ee scour the virepleace. Theer's a letter theer. Tak' thiccy over to's Lordship's to Upcott Hall. Tak' it 'eeself—zee un 'eeself. Don't 'ee let Miah know 'bout it. Slip out back way over to Hall. 'Ear what 'ee saith when he read'th yon letter. Bring a neighbour in when I'm gone, ma-deear. 'Tis a lone me-aid, Loord A'mighty! 'Twasn't never noan o' my wills. Loord, I was druv to't!"

Cathie groped under the fireplace, and after a while she found a loosened stone. She pulled it out with some difficulty, and the letter that had lain underneath she placed in her bosom.

"Grandfer," she said, stooping over him, "I dreamed o' thiccy letter."

"Dramed? Ees, us be all drames more nor less," said the old man feebly. "All drames. I mind when I was a young un 'twadn' zo! Things seemed mighty real then; but now they'm drames, all drames—only drames!"

"Cathie, ma-deear," he said presently, "I wish I'd a-done moore for 'ee. I never thought 'ee crazed. I was proud on 'ee! But some ways I couldn' get anigh 'ee of le-ate years! Oh, Loord, I wish I'd a-done moore vor the me-aid!"

"'Ee've a-done 'ee part, Gandfer," she answered, "an' God'll bless 'ee vor't!"

With these comfortin' words in his ears the old man fell asleep.

Miah came stumbling upstairs to bed.

"Be livin' yet?" he inquired, thrusting his head in through the door.

But the girl was sleeping too, and did not hear.

Miah looked at the two, and hesitated. Then he shivered and went out.

CHAPTER XLV.

GRANDFER died in the night, and Mrs Mollard came over in the morning to do what she could. She was too timid herself to touch the corpse, so she brought over a friend who patted it into shape, and left the ghastly thing to be pressed ultimately into a coffin a size too small, which Miah had obtained cheap from an undertaker, who had made a mistake in a more particular order, and had the awkward thing hanging on his hands.

"'Tis a capital corffin," the man had said, tapping it with his knuckles. "Good stout helem. I mad' a mistake someways an' measured the ol' girl wrong, an' they was that partic'lar they wouldn't 'ave it. Kep' the corpse 'angin' about, it did, too. However, 'e's a bargain for you, if you like to tak' un."

So Miah took him. He had always a fancy for bargains.

"Got un a'ready!" exclaimed the women, when he drove up with the coffin in the butt.

"Ees. I ordered'n avore," said Miah, who wished to pocket the money he had saved.

"What! avore 'e was dead?" cried Mrs Mollard. "Who ever yert tell o' such a thing?"

"'E looks a bit shoort," said Widow Beer, who was a connoisseur in such matters. "Be zure Grandfer was a-measured right?"

"Ees," said Miah; "measured un meself."

There was a vast amount of talking when the coffin was got upstairs, but Cathie remained below. She had been chilled to death sitting up with Grandfer, for he had sapped her young life, and left her faint and dizzy.

Presently Miah and the two women came downstairs again, and Mrs Mollard turned to Grandfer's chair, and was on the point of sitting down, when Cathie said—

"Tak' care; you'm a-sittin' on Grandfer."

Mrs Mollard screamed, and jumped away.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she cried. "With a crazy maid below-stairs, an' a coopse up in chumber, my in'ards be so jumped I dunno 'ow for bear meself. When I go up in chumber 'tis the coopse, an' when I come down 'tis the me-aid. Don't 'ee look to me likey thiccy, Cathie!" she screamed. "Tak' away these avil eyes o' yourn. Oh, Loord, save us now, 'er's lookin' to the baby!"

"I wouldn' rouse 'er," said Widow Beer, in an undertone; "'er may turn on me an' tak' away my repudiation."

"I always telled Bob us didn' ought never to 'ave come," said Mrs Mollard, beginning to whimper. "Men be that masterful! An' zee what's a-comin' of it all! Grandfer in thiccy cheer just as I was gwin for sit on un—wi' my legs dotty for't so much—which means, zure an' zartain, the nextest coorpse what's a-took is me; an' don' 'ee never zay as I didn' a-zay't when the 'and o' death's upon me. Loord a' mercy on us! I'm gettin' that twitchy in my nerves I can't a-bear myself 'ere no longer. I feel my 'in'ards a-gwin away no bigger nor a pea, an' col' watter a-rinnen down my back in streams, an' wracks in my stumjick!"

Cathie turned and looked at her.

"The water rinnen be Annie's baby as was drowned. He's jus' standin' 'nigh 'ee. Theer! theer! Zee un?"

The woman gave a piercing shriek that rang through the house, and, without waiting to put on her bonnet, she caught the baby in her arms and fled from the house.

"Loord A'mighty!" cried Widow Beer, clapping her hands to her head, "I b'lieve I be mos' skeered meself!"

"'Ave 'ee ever yert tell o' a ol' man what geeve a 'oman zome'at for 'erself an' zome'at for his dotter, an' 'er kep' the both? The 'oman was a widder, I've yert tell, an'——"

But Widow Beer had caught up the clothes that

belonged to herself and Mrs Mollard, and had made for the door, through which she passed with all speed.

"Zure the me-aid's a witch," she muttered as she stumbled down the steps.

Cathie smiled to herself as the door closed behind Widow Beer.

"I've a-got the reeds o' mun now!" she said. "I can 'ave a cup o' tay in p'ace an' qui'tness; an' if Miah begins for worrit, why, I can get up over-stairs an' sit 'long o' the coopse, for he's skeert on't."

CHAPTER XLVI.

POOR old Grandfer's funeral was a melancholy affair.

The mourners were but few. The Devon damp dripped from the tombstones, and made the air heavy and unwholesome.

One little wizened old man, with white hair, came hurrying with a shuffling step to the graveside. Cathie's dark eyes pierced him through and through. When the service was over, she said to him—

"Good arternoon!" and the old man bowed, and shuffled off hastily.

"Who be 'e?" inquired Miah.

"I met un to 'torney's when I was a little maid," said Cathie.

"Met'n to 'torney's?" cried Miah.

Then it occurred to him to follow the stranger.

When he reached the road down which Grandfer had driven with Polly the Thursday before he took Cathie to market, he knew the chances were he would pass under the ivied gateway through

which the flanks of Polly had disappeared. He quickened his steps, overtook the stranger, and, outdistancing him, entered a roadside inn.

"Who be this a-dagglin' 'long the roo-ad?" he inquired of the host, peering, as he spoke, over the muslin blind in the bar-room.

The host glanced out, and replied—

"Mr Pringwood — valett, and subsequently butler, to Hupcott 'All for two-an'-forty years."

"Ah!" said Miah, in the same tone as he had ejaculated the same syllable six years before when Polly's white flanks had disappeared beneath the ivied tower of Upcott Hall.

Then, calling for an extra glass, he wended his way back to 'Postle Farm.

He expected to find Cathie there before him, but this was not the case. He waited up till past twelve; then, in despair, he went to bed.

When he rose the next morning he looked about eagerly for her, hoping that during the night she had returned; but through the whole of the day she remained invisible.

Miah had thought when Grandfer died his opportunity would come. It was the thought of this that had made him keep his attentions to Bessie well under control. Cathie, the inheritor of old Grandfer's savings, was the match for him if he could get her, and Grandfer did not linger on too long.

Her disappearance disturbed him. He wondered

whether anything had happened to her,—whether, in her wanderings, the strong current of the river had swept her away.

Then he decided she was making a move in that mysterious history of hers. How could he get to the bottom of it? What was her history? Was it merely the usual one? Was there money in it? Was she really ignorant of that history? Had Grandfer gone in silence to the tomb?—that silence which the ignorant believe is never broken? Or had Grandfer confided in the girl before he died, and should he be able, with perseverance, to worm it out of her?

He had not had much hope even at the first, and now that Cathie had disappeared, of course he had less than ever. Still, he could not help clinging to the belief that Cathie had money settled on her from some unknown source. In any case, she had now inherited all Grandfer's toil-some savings, and the farm, to the end of the year, was hers, rent free. She was worth marrying. But how could he marry her since she had disappeared? It was a sad predicament.

All that day passed without a sign of her. Supposing something had happened to her? Then, sure, as next of kin, he would come in for Grandfer's money. Or stay, the butler over at Upcott Hall was a cousin of Grandfer's. He would be counted the nearest of kin. The best plan, then, would be to sell off as much of the stock as

possible, and pocket the money, and make off with it if necessary. He went to bed rejoicing at this thought.

His joy, however, was short-lived, for at about ten o'clock on Monday, just as his hope had almost reached certainty, Mr Gingham Fox, auctioneer and valuer, drove into the yard, and, alighting from his trap, with a clerk and a notebook, beckoned Miah, and desired, with official brevity, to be conducted over the lands, out-houses, and dwelling-house of 'Postle Farm.

Miah stared.

"Wheer's the me-aid?" he inquired at last.

"How should I know?" said the valuer, testily. "I have come to value the crops and the stock, not the maid!"

Miah put his arms akimbo, and looked at the valuer doggedly.

"I'm master 'ere," he said; "you a-show me what right 'ee've got for come 'long meddlin' wi' my concerns!"

"Show the paper," said Mr Gingham Fox, passing with a business-like air to the pig-sties.

Miah could not read excepting plain print, but he glared at the paper with an angry red face.

"'Ee can vind out what 'ee will for 'ee self," he said at last. "I b'ain't gwine for show 'ee!"

The clerk hurried to his chief with the news.

"No matter," said he, producing a map; "this will serve."

Miah slouched round after them, scowling from under this doorway and that.

"They pegs een's varder 'ouse be mine," he said at a venture. "I bought'n to market o' Saturday."

But the valuer took no notice.

If Miah had not been a coward, it is probable, in the fury of his baffled avarice, he would have thrown himself on his tormentors. As it was, he merely followed them at a distance, and when they had driven out of the yard he killed the best pig, and prepared to enjoy roast pork to the week's end.

A man, however, arrived in the afternoon, and, paying him his week's wages, told him to seek work elsewhere.

With oaths and curses Miah demanded an explanation.

"Wheer's the me-aid?" he kept repeating, "thickey avil-eyed — witch?"

Finally he placed himself at the farmhouse door.

"I b'ai'nt gwin vor lave 'ere till I 'ear the rights o't. If the me-aid be dade, these yer varm, an' all what's on't is, be mine, an' I b'ain't a-gwin for budge for no — like you be!"

A policeman settled the question two hours later, and, cursing and swearing and violently abusive, Miah was dragged from the farm.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LORD FROBISHER had finished dinner, and had retired to his library. Cathie, who had her letter to deliver, rang the bell at the front door. The footman opened it. Had it been any one else but Crazy Cathie there, he would have bidden her go round to the back. But Crazy Cathie's evil eye was too well known in the neighbourhood, and he dared not offend her. He bade her be seated in the hall.

As luck would have it, Pringwood had gone into Upcott on business, or Cathie would never have seen the squire. As it was, Brushwood entered the library, and, going up to the hearthrug, addressed his master respectfully.

"If you please, sir, a young woman has called and wishes to see you."

"I see no one," Lord Frobisher answered. "Since you have been in my service over two years, and have not learnt this fact, you may take your month's notice."

The man bowed. As he reached the door Cathie

pushed past him and entered. The footman put out an arresting hand, but she gave him a defiant glance from her fiery eye. The man, out of temper at the loss of his situation, made no further effort to stop her. He rather rejoiced at the thought of Lord Frobisher's annoyance.

Cathie came forward till she stood opposite the squire. She had never curtsyed since her childhood, and she did not curtsey now.

Lord Frobisher was too much a gentleman to show his anger; but he flushed slightly.

"You have made a mistake, young woman," he said; "this is the wrong room for you."

"I've a letter for 'ee," said Cathie. "Go out, young man," she added to Brushwood; "this 'ere business is private."

The footman hesitated, but receiving no command from his master to stay, he withdrew.

Lord Frobisher took the letter she held out to him.

"I believe this concludes your business," he said, turning to the bell. But Cathie stayed him.

"I want 'ee for read it now," she said.

"That is quite unnecessary," replied Lord Frobisher. "The answer can be sent to you."

"Read it now!" she repeated.

And Lord Frobisher, because he was old perhaps, and any violent assertion of his will was attended by serious results, or because the power of the girl was great, or because, perhaps, a doubtful past had taken some of his courage from him, obeyed.

He placed his pince-nez on his nose, wincing a little as he did so, for he hated to own his natural force abated. Bending towards the lamp, he glanced over the letter with the intention of satisfying the girl by the promise of a favourable answer; but before he had got over a couple of words he began to tremble violently. Twice he tried to speak; twice he failed.

At last he hissed out, while his hands gripped the arm of his chair till they were white and numb—

"It's false! it's false! Damn your impertinence! I say it's false! By God, I'll have you put into confinement for a madwoman! There's no truth in this!"

Then the face of Cathie changed. She was a tall woman, but she grew taller. She was absolutely ignorant of the contents of the letter, but she remembered Grandfer's dying words. She felt within herself that a crisis in her life had come.

Lord Frobisher, peering at her through the general gloom that pervaded the room, could see her only indistinctly. In his anxiety to see her more plainly he attempted to tear off the dark shade that covered the lamp, and which was put on to throw the strongest light possible on his book or paper—it was always the lamp with him that was dim and not his sight. But the shade was heavy, and he had to take two shaking hands.

Very slowly, with his weak fingers, he raised the

shade, and the light became more and more general, almost like the dawning of a day.

When the shade was off he looked up. The powerful light streamed on the beautiful face and figure of the girl as she stood motionless, haughtily regarding the man who had dared to accuse her dead grandfather of lying.

When Lord Frobisher's eyes fell upon her, not being a woman, no sound came from him, but his jaw dropped, and his face turned an ashen grey.

Cathie perceived at once the advantage was now on her side, though the reason she could not divine. The man before her was in abject terror. While he was in terror hers was the advantage, and she did not move for fear of dispelling it.

At length Lord Frobisher gasped in a low voice, dry and hard as the speech of an automaton, yet intensely distinct—

"Are you a living woman?" Then smiting his hand to his forehead, "God help me, it's she! It's she!"

He sank into his chair, but only for a moment. With a despairing effort he rose and unlocked his secretaire, hastily catching up a pile of bank-notes.

"If it's a spirit—we shall see—we shall see——" he kept muttering. "A spirit hath not flesh and blood—it won't take bank-notes!"

He looked over his shoulder.

"Still there," he muttered.

Then the woman in Cathie's heart spoke.

"Coorse I be!" she said, with the humouring tenderness one uses towards children. "What did 'ee s'pose? I be a woman right 'nough—leastaways I s'pose I be—I never yert tell no other."

"Can you keep a secret?—will this help you?" he said eagerly, holding out the bank-notes to her, and thrusting them into her hand.

Cathie had no secret to keep. She had never received of charity. Her first impulse was to throw the bank-notes in his face, but something stayed her. She took them quietly.

"When these are gone there are more," he said with a distressing eagerness.

Cathie nodded and moved to the door. When she got outside, she walked home thoughtfully.

"Theer's a purpose in't," she said to herself. "Now what be 't? I'd like for know. Theer's some'at ahind—some'at I never thought on, nor can't think on now nether. 'When these are gone there are more.' Well, never mind. Crazy Cathie can mind 'er own geese!"

That night, when Pringwood came back, he was summoned to his master's presence. He came in suspecting the truth, for Brushwood had told him something of what had transpired during the evening. When he met the old man's fiery eye, he knew there was trouble in store.

The two looked at each other, the master from the arm-chair, out of which he had twice vainly

striven to rise. He tried to speak, but the jaw only worked convulsively, and a little foam dropped from the lip.

"You villain!" he hissed at last; "you villain! Leave my sight and never return!"

The old servant threw himself on his knees.

"Sir! sir!" he cried. "Yer lordship! Think of God Almighty! Think of the Judgment Seat! No 'arm b'ain't come to 'ee through it, an' less o' hell hereafter! Tak' it easy, my lord; tak' it easy! You'll bring 'eeself to 'arm! Oh, tak' it easy, my lord! Don't be hard on me! I done it for the best!"

He leant forward and gently stroked the withered hand of his master with his own withered fingers.

"I'm all 'ee've a-got left, my lord! Don't 'ee go for be angered with me!"

Then rising to his feet, and raising his hand to heaven—

"I swear to God I'm thankful I done it! An' you may order me away, but I'll never leave 'ee! Your secrets is my secrets." Then, speaking in a rapid undertone, and gathering intensity with every word, "When the las' dread hour comes, my lord, an' you come to face your Maker, you'll thank me yet! An' you *dursn't* send me from you! Think, my lord, when your mind's fitful like, an' the words burst from 'ee that 'ee've kep' dark these seventeen year an' more, who'll 'earken an' never tell, but me? No, my lord, 'ee can't do wi'out me; an' yer know,"

he finished, with a sob, "'ow I'd die for 'ee! Aren't I lived a life as foreign to my natur' as sunshine is to night? An' why? For love of 'ee, my lord, for love of 'ee! The very milk o' human kindness 'as froze in my blood for love of 'ee, my lord, for love of 'ee! I've counted all the goodness I learnt to my mother's knee as dung that I might serve 'ee the better—an' all for love of 'ee, my lord, for love of 'ee! Tak' back the cruel words that I mus' leave 'ee—for if I leave 'ee at all, 'tis my dead body they mus' carry over threshold, for I'll cling to 'ee yet in life!"

He threw himself at his master's feet, and his long, tearless sobs filled the heavy silence.

A thousand conflicting emotions chased themselves over the master's face. One moment loathing, spurning, fierce hatred; the next, desolation, fear, bitterness. Then slowly the face settled into calm.

When the old man ventured at length to raise himself, there was one slow tear on the master's cheek.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE same night of Grandfer's funeral Cathie had turned up at the old schoolhouse. She came in a cart, and before any one had time to interfere, she had ordered the carrier to carry her large oak chest and various parcels, and deposit them inside the cottage verandah.

Madge and Cocksey both rushed out.

"I be gwine for stay long o' you," said Cathie, calmly.

Madge turned aside to hide her laughter, while Miss Scottie took the girl's hand and patted it in order to gain time for thought. The sight of a large red and white bundle being deposited on the doorstep upset Madge so much that she ran away to have her laugh out behind the kitchen door. The utter calmness of the whole proceeding struck her as quite too funny; and poor Cocksey's helpless discomfiture delighted her.

Miss Scottie continued to pat Cathie's hand, and to see with the rest of the world that of course she was crazy.

Then Cathie suddenly said, "P'raps, though, 'ee don't want me!" and Miss Scottie, being at best an impulsive, compassionate soul, took both Cathie's hands between her own and cried—

"My dear, of course we want you! We want you very much!"

Then she saw what perhaps no one but Temple had seen since the days of Cathie's childhood—soft human tears spring into her defiant eyes.

She turned away abruptly.

"That's my chesty!" she said, nodding at the gaunt old chest that held all the best of her earthly belongings. "I would a-stayed to 'Postle Varm if it 'adn't a-been for bein' of a scholard. I mus' be a scholard!"

"What is becoming of the farm, my dear?"

"Well, I dunno zac'ly. I thought mebbe 'ee could think on some'at."

Here Madge arrived, looking rather red in the face.

"Very glad to see you, Cathie," she said.

Cathie looked doubtful.

"Well, someways I was a-drawed here," she said.

"Cathie has left 'Postle Farm!" said Cocksey.

"Who has taken it on?"

"No one aren't. No one won't 'fore Lady Day!"

Then Madge caught Cocksey by the arm.

"I will!" she said.

And Cocksey fell back on the sofa more dead than alive, while Cathie burst into tears.

"Oh!" she cried, "my 'eart's a-bound up in un! If 'ee'll but let me milky an' tend the pigs an' poultry, I'll be scholard atween whiles, an' I won' ask no wages!"

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CHAPTER XLIX.

NO sooner said than done. Madge never let the grass grow under her feet. A valuer, as we have seen, was speedily despatched to 'Postle Farm, and in a few days' time Cathie had a nice little sum in the bank beside her grandfather's savings.

Before moving into the house, it was necessary to have painters and masons at work. Madge was in a wild state of excitement. Her first view of 'Postle Farm delighted her. She could wish for nothing better than to end her days there, she said.

Meanwhile Cathie stayed on in the little cottage till 'Postle Farm should be fit to receive them. She studied every morning with Miss Scottie. In the afternoon she always disappeared. And they did not ask her where she went—they let her have her freedom.

"Poor ol' Grandfer!" said Cathie one day, as she opened her lesson-books.

"We were so sorry to hear you had lost him," said Miss Scottie.

"I an't lost 'im! 'e be 'ere 'bout as usual!"

"Surely he's buried by now?"

"Ees, he's buried. They may dig dark 'oles for folk an' stick mun in, but, bless 'ee life, they don't stay theer!"

But Miss Scottie was nothing if not conscientious. It was not right to allow the girl to remain ignorant. Accordingly in the evening she asked her—

"Cathie, what makes you think your grandfather is not in his grave?"

But Cathie remained obstinately silent.

One afternoon Miss Scottie and Madge had been to see how 'Postle Farm was progressing.

"Suppose," said Miss Scottie, as they neared Stibb Farm, "we call in here? They might throw some light on Cathie, because she really does seem queer sometimes."

Mrs Mollard curtseyed when the smart little pony-carriage drove up to her door, and dusted a chair for her visitor. There was nothing she more enjoyed than a visit from the gentry. Miss Scottie was not a great adept at leading conversation into a deserted channel. But their neighbour's death was naturally uppermost in the thoughts of the Mollards.

"I do trusty, now," said Mrs Mollard, "'us 'ill 'ave volks as is more neighbourly nor what they was. Theer waren't nothin' neighbourly 'bout mun. They was so lonesome like they skeered volks. Poor ol' Grandfer, back along when Master brought un over 'ere first, 'e was a kind an' neighbourly ol' man; but 'e turned off queerish. 'E took in's 'ead volk was inquisitive, an' I'm sure more nor neigh-

bourly interest I never took in nobody. But Miah 'e was always—well, excuse me for sayin' of it—but 'e was always a avil-lookin' feller; an' as for the me-aid—well, 'er was the wust o' the lot o' mun!"

"What was the matter with the maid?" asked Miss Scottie. "Do you mean Cathie?"

"Ees, the very same, ma'am! Oh, well, 'er was kind o' crazed like, volk said, but whether 'twas true or no I relly couldn' zay—volk does talk up ol' rummage—an' that's what they telled about 'er!"

"Well, she was a near neighbour of yours. You would have been the best judge as to her being crazy," said Miss Scottie.

"Well, yes, 'er was a neighbour, us might zay; but relly I never zeed the me-aid—'er was out an' 'bout—us never 'ad no intermixtions. I couldn' zay whether theer was truth in't or no, I'm sure."

Bless you, your peasant proper is not going to divulge his heart beliefs to you on a first visit, nor yet on a second! It would take many a long year before Mrs Mollard could feel sufficient confidence to throw her own explanation on the subject of Cathie's craziness to any one outside her own class.

She wandered on to other subjects now, and Miss Scottie, nervous in her effort to bring the conversation back to Cathie, and fearful of out-staying Madge's patience, speedily withdrew.

Madge took a common-sense view of the case.

"She isn't crazy," she said. "She's only original."

One evening, about a fortnight later, Mrs Mollard was taking the bread out of the oven, when a voice said—

“Where’s Bessie?”

When she turned she could see no one. She ran to the door and looked out. Not a soul was in sight. Then Mrs Mollard wrung her hands.

“’Tis a sign!” she cried. “’Tis a sign! Sure as fate, the maid’ll be took for death ’fore the year’s out!”

When her husband came in, she told him.

“Wull, wheer is ’er?”

“I dunno!”

“Wull, why didn’t ’ee look?”

“I never thought on’t!”

“’Ee only fancied ’ee yert it,” said Mr Mollard, comfortably; “that’s what ’twas!”

But Mrs Mollard was quite positive, and, as a result, she was extremely vigilant.

The next time she noticed Bessie going out, she said nothing, but she followed her. Keeping carefully out of sight, she saw a man presently coming across the field, and as he drew nearer she recognised Miah.

They stopped close together in the pathway, and then they went forward, with Miah’s arm round Bessie’s waist. Then the mother was furious. She raised her voice angrily and called Bessie back; and that night there was a stormy scene in the usually peaceful kitchen at Stibb Farm.

Mrs Mollard, as she sat sadly discussing the subject with her husband, kept repeating—

"Well, I know one thing, Cathie 'ath bewitched 'er! I know my poor maid wouldn' never tak' up wi' a ol' slouchin 'ulk o' a great feller like thickey Miah be, wi'out 'er was bewitched. It's all along o' that wicked me-aid! 'Er don' come to 'arm 'erself, 'er be that cute! 'Er's maisterful all the while some poor other body shall come to devilment! I'm sure I wish 'twadn't wicked for weesh 'er out o' world! An' I don' b'lieve 'tis, nether; an' I do a-weesh 'er out o't, an' ol' Nick joy o' 'er, I do! I do! My poor little innercent me-aid, what 'arm 'er might a' come to wi' thickey feller to 'usband! If it 'adn't a-been I was kind o' wracksled in my min' I shouldn' never a' discovered it, an' 'e might a' took an' marr'ed 'er whether us willed or no. Oh, that Cathie! I know 'tis all along o' 'er, for I meeted 'er eye o' Zaturdey!

Thus do we misinterpret our best blessings, and call them curses!

Mr Mollard sighed heavily, and they went upstairs slowly to bed, the wife carrying the baby, and the man in his stockinged feet so as not to wake the sleeping children.

CHAPTER L.

"I MUS' be dressed proper," said Cathie that same evening, when Miss Scottie and Madge returned. "'Ow do 'ee get 'ee things for fit. These 'ere now," touching Madge's well-fitting coat, "'an't got so much as a creasy in 'un! You show me some'at what I can buy an' clothey myself in!"

"I am so glad you want to be tidy!" said Miss Scottie, almost with tears in her eyes. "If you live with Miss Montague, you must try and always look nice."

"Zo I will!" said Cathie, heartily.

The next day Cathie went into Upcott for the purpose of stocking herself with clothes. She went to the dressmaker first to be tried on.

"You mus' mak' 'un for fit," she said.

"We can easy do that, Miss Tythycolt, with a figure like yours," replied the dressmaker, putting her head on one side, as she fixed in a pin.

It was the first time in her life Cathie had ever been called Miss Tythycott.

"Miss Tythycott!" she repeated, with a little laugh. "Lor', what a name it be! I mos' forgot I'd a-got 'un!"

"I understand you're quite an heiress?" said the dressmaker amiably.

"I've 'nough for pay for 'ee," said Cathie, nodding at the cloth dress. "I dunno as 'ow what's over an' above is a matter what concerns 'ee."

"Certainly not!" said the dressmaker, a little piqued.

When Cathie had been carefully fitted, she went to the bootmaker's.

"'Ere's as nice a pair o' bootses as you'd zee from now to Michaelmas!" said Mr Pedlar, producing a pair of thick farm ones, and tapping the soles with pride.

"My dear zoul!" cried Cathie, turning away in disgust. "Tak' 'em away! Give's a pair o' gloss kid shoeties!"

The bootmaker stared a moment.

"The glacé-kid a'n't got no wear in 'em, 'ee know," he said. "Betterment volk wears 'em mos'ly; but," with a pitying smile, "bless yer 'eart, they'm foolish, 'ee know—they'm foolish. Money to they b'ain't no hobstacle! They'm got it for spend, an' they spends it—that's all the good 'tis to mun—for spend. 'Tain't for use, 'tain't for sarvice, 'tis for spend. An' what's us do? Us supplies 'em with glaciés an' sichlike unendurables, an' they wears mun an' buys more. But

for use now—for reycommend for frien's—give me a good strong calvy-leather, wi' iron bands to 'eel, an' a cap to toe o' mun, an' there you be proper fixed up!"

"Go 'long, my dear!" said the bootmaker's wife, who had now come into the shop, attracted by curiosity. "'Tain't that kind o' thing the young leddy wants at all! Fetch out them smoothy-leathered, wi' the siller buckles to mun; theym's the soort Miss Tythycott wants. 'Tis Miss Tythycott, b'ain't it? Ees; I thought—I thought 'twas. *You* know, Da, over to 'Postle's? You've a-come in for quite a middlin' lot o' money, I un'erstan'? Gen'elmen don' un'erstan' as 'ow, when a leddy's got money, 'er likes for spend it. Fetch out they shoesies with the siller buckles, Da. There, now!" she cried, holding them out to view at arm's length, "Only look to mun! Now, relly, they be so delicate like, so gentryfied as might say, b'ain' 'em now? Tak' away the farm clouts now, Da. Miss Tythycott don't want none such!"

By the time Cathie had made the round of the Upcott trades - people she was well and neatly dressed, and where her own taste failed Miss Scottie and Madge helped. All her being surged towards the thought of making herself a suitable wife for Temple, and it was astonishing how naturally she bore herself in her new clothes, and how quick she was to catch the ways and manners of Miss Scottie and Madge. Unlike many an-

other rustic beauty, she was not spoilt by conventional clothes, and Madge said ruefully—

"The end of it all will be—I shall be taken for her, and she will be taken for me."

Strangers, when they met her, turned to look; and one young man—a bicyclist of course—was audacious enough to pretend he had lost his way, and stopping, raised his cap, asking—

"I beg your pardon, is this the Upcott road?"

And when she answered in that wonderful soft-tongued rolling Devonshire of hers, he almost turned pale with astonishment as he hurried off in the wrong direction to the one she had indicated, so taken aback was he.

At last 'Postle Farm was ready to receive them, and they migrated thither, Miss Scottie, Madge, and Catherine.

CHAPTER LI.

"THIS waiting for dead men's shoes is a melancholy kind of business," said Temple to himself. "The old fellow had no business to make me sell out of the army. What a good-for-nothing existence mine is, with never a will of my own—never sure that my plans won't clash with his. And ever since that affair with Cathie I feel as miserable as a bandicoot—whatever that is,—I'm damned if I know! Years perhaps of waiting, during which time I can do nothing without exciting suspicion, even if I had the necessary funds, which I haven't. There she is one side of the water, and there I am the other—that's the nearest we ever are: more often it's two hundred miles apart. What's going to be the end of it all, that's what puzzles me. God knows, I love her! And yet—the future?"

He paced up and down the club-room.

Wouldn't it be better after all to break it off with her? and yet he couldn't.

He flung himself into a chair and closed his

eyes, and the old farm stood before him. How well he knew it under every aspect. When the dark clouds scudded overhead, and the rain beat against its grey walls; when the sunlight flooded all the landscape, and left it frowning still; when the leaves on the elm trees turned yellow, and the sea-gulls flew up from the river white as snow against the black horizon; when the great barn doors gaped open, and the golden carts of corn were swallowed into the darkness, and the rich grain was garnered. But, best of all, he knew it when the sun was setting, and the outline of the Upcott hills crept slowly upward on the other side like an all-embracing thought that takes possession of the mind. He knew exactly how the sunlight looked when it caught the trunks of the twelve elm trees, till they shone like silver, leaving all the upper limbs in mystic darkness; and how the long length of the chimney grew across the roof, and all the farther side was lost in gathering gloom, as if Mother Nature had breathed on half the mirror and left a cloudland on it. Yes; he knew it every inch, and he loved it every inch, and the beautiful girl within it. Only he wanted her as a kind of dreamland, an idyll in his life, a beautiful summerland that should never stale with custom, nor grow weary under a noon-day sun; a summerland that should be visited only when his heart was in tune, and should never have the fierce light of criticism thrown

upon it by an influx of sordid people of the world who could never understand, and who, his inmost soul told him, would influence him in spite of himself. He wanted to lead two lives — an Arcadian life and a conventional life; and he could not see how the two could be combined. And so he fretted out his existence until his next recall to Upcott.

There had been a good deal of fretting in Cathie's life too, since she had seen him last. She had thought to live at 'Postle's Farm would be the dream of her life. But somehow now it was different. She missed the old man who had never spoken a harsh word to her. He was gone from the ingle-nook, and her heart was heavy for him. A certain reverent tolerance had always marked his attitude towards her, and though she had heeded it little while she had it, it left a gaping wound now it was gone. Her effort to check the roughness of her speech, and to mind her manners, was a constant drag on her impulsive spirit, and the loss of her freedom at times almost maddened her. She had her duties to perform, and she was expected to perform them at stated times, at regular intervals. There was no running out on the grassy upland when the spirit moved her; no creeping softly to her "best parlour" and taking out her violin to charm away the loneliness, or to satisfy her yearning for all that was beautiful, elevated, and refined. The "best parlour" was

not hers to use now, and she shrank from playing before strangers, because the violin was her heart's music, it was part of herself, and she was too proud to crave sympathy.

One day when she had been told off to do the household tasks she hated and despised, she suddenly stamped her foot, and, flinging down her dust-pan and brush at Miss Scottie's terrified feet, she exclaimed—

"I b'ain't a-gwin for do it, then! I don't want yer ol' wages! What's wages to me? I can get 'nough, an' more'n 'nough, wi'out workin' for't. I telled 'ee from the first 'twas a scholard I wanted for be! A-workin' an' a-sweatin' mornin', noon, an' night,—I tell 'ee I'm clean zick on't, an' I'll never so much as wring another floor-cloth! I'm gwin for be a scholard, not a mucky me-aid in a towzer apren!"

She swung out of the house, leaving poor Miss Scottie scandalised.

Angry bitter tears were in Cathie's eyes as she hurried along the hillside, longing for the old days when she was master of herself in every way: for, alas! she was no longer master of her heart—it was crying out all the while for Temple; and the loss of her freedom, even in this particular, chafed her.

So fast was she walking, and so bitter were her thoughts, that she never perceived Temple until she was almost face to face with him.

He held out his arms and took her to his heart. It was the moment of her weakness. She cared nothing at that moment for the future ; she wanted only something to stanch the wounds in her heart for the present. At that moment Cathie's future was in Temple's hand. She was tired out and wearied in spirit ; hope deferred (for his coming had been long) had made her heart sick. She could not face the thought of life without him ; she was alone, and in all the wide world there was none but he to love her.

In a few broken words she told him of the death of her grandfather and her altered circumstances. A tide of colour flushed into his face and left him pale.

"There is nothing for it now, dear, but to give yourself to me," he said unsteadily. "You know that I love you, and will care for you all my life."

She was too tired to dispute. What did it matter? As well lose his love in that way as in any other.

"I've a-ried to mak' a scholard for 'ee," she said brokenly, "but life be all strivin', an' strugglin', an' ugliness."

"We must go away where we are not known," he said. "Life will be beautiful to us both yet. Listen ; put together such things as you want, and dress yourself so as not to attract notice, and I will meet you here below, in the Salt Marsh, at—let me see—it's two hours yet to flood-tide—at ten o'clock then—not a moment later. Will you be there?"

Cathie bowed her head wearily. She felt no

satisfaction in the prospect; but the night vigils with her dying grandfather, and her disappointment at the same old tasks to be got through at 'Postle Farm, Temple's long silence and his absence, had told upon her health and spirits.

She watched Temple disappearing down the hill, saw him unmoor his boat and land on the other side. Then she went back to the farm. She avoided the inmates, and slipped in the back way to her room.

Poor Miss Scottie, with a very burnt face, was trying to fry chops for tea, in the absence of her wilful Abigail.

"It's much more fun without Cathie, really," said Madge. "I wish she'd go. She always lords it over us, as if the place still belonged to her. Perhaps she will go, and then it will be ripping fun, Cocksey; we shall do everything for ourselves!"

"If I'd only learnt cooking in my youth!" groaned Cocksey. "These chops seem quite black outside and quite red in!"

"Ugh! I hate underdone meat! After all, I wish Cathie would come in. It's too bad to leave us quite in the lurch like this!"

Cathie was upstairs putting her few things together. The tears welled into her eyes as she stowed away Grandfer's fiddle in the bottom of the oak chest. She wondered when she would see it again.

"I loved un," she sobbed; "he was the friend o' my 'eart an' Grandfer's too!"

Presently she crept noiselessly downstairs. It was still too early to meet Temple, but she feared Miss Scottie might come up to find her.

She stole out softly and closed the farm gate behind her noiselessly. The sheep-dog bounded to her side but she motioned him back, and with drooping tail and sad eyes he watched the girl pass out of sight.

The moon was full, but being low in the sky it gave comparatively little light. There was no detail in the landscape. Only the spiked branches of the firs in the little wood were silhouetted against the sky : beneath them, all was impenetrable gloom.

She turned for one last look at the grey walls so cold and implacable to the stranger's eye ; but to the girl they were but the stern workaday front, and deep within them the heart pulsated and throbbed. An overwhelming sense of coming disaster, a stern insistence that from this moment the past must be for ever dead to her, fell upon her like a suffocating pall. She threw herself on the ground in a passion of tears. The little window in the kitchen threw out a cheery ray of light, but not for her—not for her. Something seemed to tell her that light of peace and contentment would never more be hers. The dark curtain of fate was being slowly drawn across it.

Dashing the tears from her eyes, she sprang to her feet and began to descend the hill. How often as a child had she pressed the short grey grass with

dancing feet. Now her steps were heavy and her heart was lead.

It was far too early to expect Temple. She sat down on the bank and watched. The tide was on the turn. It rushed out with a swift relentless force. Scarcely conscious of thought, she remained sitting and waiting.

She could tell by the glitter of the moon now that the tide was almost out. Now and then a seagull screeched. Then she began to listen attentively, and presently she could catch the faint silver dip of oars. A moment later the boat shot full into the pathway of the moon. And an exaltation filled her spirit. The sense that Temple was at hand, and with him deliverance, stirred the pulses of her being.

He sprang on to the bank just as Catherine reached it.

"My darling!" he said, holding her to his breast. "I have been tormented with doubts. I thought what shall I do if she is not there?"

"I telled 'ee I'd come," she said softly.

He lifted her little box into the boat, and then stood and stretched out his hand to her.

"Can you step from there?"

The moon was full on her beautiful face and glittered in her eyes. She stretched out a hand to him. At the same moment she stepped back with a low cry.

"What is it?" cried Temple.

She stood and pointed.

"The shinin' lady!" she gasped,— "the shinin' lady! Theer's danger in the boat!"

"You are over-wrought," he said, leaping on to the bank again. "You are excited, my own! There is nothing there!"

"Yes, yes!" she cried; "can't 'ee see?" and she broke from him and went backwards a step. "Oh! when I see her beckon, I follow tho' it be blood an' vire; but when I see 'er wi' 'er 'and upraised," and she raised her own, standing straight and still in the moonlight as she did so, "I tell 'ee," she breathed, "nor God nor Davil would bring me on!"

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CHAPTER LII.

THEN Temple swore beneath his breath. His hand shook as he grasped hers.

"Cathie, don't be so foolish," he urged; "there is nothing there. Indeed, my darling, if there were I could see it."

He began to pull her towards the boat.

"Tak' care, you'll drow 'er in's watter!" she called.

In spite of himself he shivered. Was she really crazed?

"Darling," he cried, going back to her, "you once said you trusted me. Trust me now—you are safe—I love you—there is nothing there!"

But she shook her head, holding firmly back.

"Dearest, for my sake, put this foolish fancy from you! Another minute and it will be too late! See, the boat is half out of the water already. We shall be caught on a sandbank, and all Upcott will see us!"

"All Upcott won't, for I b'ain't a-gwin."

"You can't leave me in the lurch like this!" cried

Temple. "You can't be turned by a foolish fancy. Do you love me so little?" he cried, catching her passionately in his arms. "Cathie, we haven't tried for this—it isn't our fault! It is fate that has decreed it! I swear before God no thought of any thing was on my mind when I met you on the hill; it was your misery—your loneliness. Darling, I love you! I want to take care of you all my life!"

She looked in his face and tried to speak, but could not. The agony of passionate love and despair stamped on the face he loved swept Temple off his feet like a mighty rush of water. Everything was forgotten in that mad moment, as he caught her to his breast.

"I don't care," he said fiercely, and speaking in a quick undertone—"I don't care. Nothing matters but you and love. Let everything else go. What is anything to me? Love such as ours is God-given. Everything must give way before it. Catherine—my own—my love—come!"

She was beginning to tremble. The old landmarks were being washed away. It seemed as if their love filled all the earth and sanctified every action. In moments of strong passion reason becomes obliterated. Nothing remains to guide us but the wild effort to recall what once, in our calmer moments, reason taught us was the right course of action. Failing that, we are lost.

Cathie paused, and in that pause all heaven bent to help her.

She struggled back from him.

"I can't!" she gasped. "Don't ask it of me—for love o' me, don't!"

"Is that your answer?" His tone frightened her.

"It be, it be!" she said, with tearless sobs.

"Your nature is incapable of love," he cried fiercely. "I always felt you were somehow outside of me, and that I could never master you; and this is the upshot of it."

He flung her from him.

"I would to God I had never met you!" he said, with an intensity of bitterness. "It was an evil day for me when I climbed the hill to teach you how to be a scholar—a damnable day when I gave my heart into your keeping. You were a witch from the first, and the country-people knew it. You dragged out my heart in spite of myself, and now when I wait for yours in exchange you tempt me to the last pitch of endurance and then fling me from you. It was a cursed day when I met you—a cursed day when your lips first touched mine. You have me in your power. Were heaven open to me without you I would not enter, and into the very nethermost hell would I go for one hour of you, body and soul."

He spoke with an intensity of intoxicated passion. Her frustration of his plans had maddened him. He was in a mood so desperate that life held nothing for him at the moment but his own ungratified passion.

She threw her tender arms about him.

"I love 'ee," she sobbed; "but, O God in heaven, you ask too much!"

"What are your kisses to me?" he said. "Empty promises that have no meaning."

He hurled her from him, and she fell: on the still air a cry of agony echoed faintly through the hills.

Temple shoved the boat off unheeding, and at the same instant a strong voice called—

"Is any one hurt? Answer!"

But the wild splash of oars, as Temple in fury rowed himself from the spot that had tortured him, was the only answer.

A dark figure passed close to Catherine, but the bush against which she had fallen hid her from his sight. He groped once within a foot of her, and then, coming back, his fingers actually played upon her loosened hair and took it for the seaweed and the grass.

CHAPTER LIII.

"WELL, I wish Cathie would come," said Madge, "or you would come to bed, Cocksey. I don't mind which; but I do wish"—with a very big yawn—"one or the other would happen. There she is!" as the sheep-dog's bark sounded loudly through the yard.

"Shep wouldn't bark at her," said Miss Scottie. "My dear, this is a very lonely farm for two females. Somehow Cathie was so muscular and had a power with her, I never felt nervous when she was here."

A man's voice bade the dog lie down.

"My!" said Madge, "ain't this romantic?"

The next moment a knock at the door echoed along the oak beams of the kitchen where the two were sitting.

"I'll open the door," said Madge.

"No; I'll open it," said Cocksey, pushing her back.

"Well, let's both open it."

So they went together.

"Anybody there?" called Cocksey's high treble.

"Robert!" came the answer in a deep bass.

At which both the women screamed and flung open wide the door.

A tall man stood outside, and Madge dragged him in, and there was much excitement; while the sheep-dog sniffed suspiciously at the stranger's heels.

"Why ever didn't you let us know?" cried Madge at last. "Our Abigail's gone off in a huff, and we neither of us can cook chops—only potatoes."

Robert said he didn't mind that in the least. He had come to ruralise with his sister for the space of three months, and was quite prepared to take rural luck.

"When you wrote from 'Postle Farm it was too much for me. This is the old place I sketched in for a background to my Academy picture last year."

"Good gracious!" cried Madge, "and Cathie was the girl! I always said I had seen her somewhere. How awfully odd!"

"Can you put me up for three months?"

"My dear, for our sakes stay till the remainder of the lease. We're rather nervous here."

"No occasion for that. I don't suppose you brought the family plate?"

Scottie shook her head. "I don't know who would clean it," she said in her matter-of-fact way.

"We didn't mind when Cathie was here," said Madge.

"Who's Cathie?"

"Oh! just a girl who cooked for us."

"My dear, now do, pray, excuse me," said Cocksey, "but that's just what she wasn't."

"Well, I mean she was supposed to," corrected Madge.

"She's a wonderful girl," cried Cocksey. "She does so love to learn, and she's so beautiful and so——"

Madge put her hand before Cocksey's mouth.

"I'm sick of Cathie. I'm angry with her. Which of us two is going to peel the potatoes?"

"I, of course, my dear," said Cocksey, bustling off. "Oh, dear!" she said, rustling back presently; "I do wish that dear child was back."

"What dear child?" asked Robert.

"Cathie."

"Your Abigail?"

"Your model."

"My model! Where did she go?"

"No one knows."

"Have you no idea?"

"None," said Madge. "She went off in a regular tantrum."

Then Robert remembered the cry by the river.

"She wouldn't try to drown herself, I suppose?"

Miss Scottie screamed, and put her hands to her ears.

"Oh, no; she's all right," said Madge; and they sat down comfortably to supper.

When they were all ready for bed Montague said—

"Shan't I go and call or look or do something to find this Abigail?"

Miss Scottie shook her head. "We must leave the door on the latch, and a light in the window."

"She is a curious, uncanny kind of a creature," said Madge.

So they all went to bed.

And with the dawn the tide came creeping up. Nearer and nearer it flowed, higher and higher. It reached the spot where Temple had moored his boat, and it washed out the marks of his passionate footsteps. Then it surged higher and touched the foot of the girl still lying under the thorn tree.

Montague tossed on his bed and could not sleep. He dropped into a doze at last, but woke at the sound of a woman's cry. He started up in bed and knew he had been dreaming. But sleep was over for him. Through the square window-pane the dawn was faintly glimmering, like a mountain tarn silvered with a white reflection. He threw on his clothes and went out and groped his way downstairs. His sister's cats ran mewing to him under the impression it was now breakfast-time. The dead ashes were in the cold grate; outside a cock crowed drowsily. He opened the kitchen door and looked out on the grey yard. A calf blaired, and the ever-

hungry pig grunted. The rooks were not moving yet in the budding branches of the elms. The sheep-dog, having accepted Montague into the bosom of the family, ran up to him, lazily stretching and yawning, and licked his hand. As Montague passed under the elm-trees, along the beaten, knotted pathway, an old rook stirred drowsily and called sleepily "Caw!" and from the neighbouring branches came the answers, "Caw! caw! caw!" till the air was clamorous with their calling and the beating of their dusky wings.

Montague strode down to the river. Over the hill the mist hung, wreathing into shapes and forms quaint and fantastic. But he did not pause just then to observe the effects of nature. He hurried down the hill, till he reached, as far as he could judge, somewhere about the place from whence he had heard the woman cry.

There was a thorn-bush a little way ahead of him. He could see something white lying out on a tuft of grass. Then he reached it at a stride. It was a woman's hand, and already the tide was surging over her lower limbs. He lifted her quickly into a place of safety, and, as he bent his face close to hers in the half light, he recognised the features he had painted in the autumn of the year before—the girl whose personality he had obstinately refused to allow. He had looked upon her as he might have a beautiful piece of sculpturing. She was no woman to him; and though the imprisoned soul had sometimes

gazed at him with a passion of intensity for one brief heart-beat, he would have none of it. She was his model, but he respected her.

He was a strong, muscular man, but he looked with some misgiving at the hill before him. Catherine was no sylph; she was a full-grown, fully developed woman, and he doubted if he could mount the hill with her in his arms.

By a lucky chance his brandy flask was in his pocket, put there in case he should lose his way on a rather longer stage than even a strong bicyclist usually faces. He tried to force a little between her closed teeth. He was thankful to find her body dry, save for the dew. At any rate, she was not drowned.

The beautiful, luminous eyes opened wearily, and stared up at him in indifferent curiosity.

"Do you think, with my help, you could walk?" said Montague.

Her eyes closed heavily.

So he took off his coat and bent over her.

"If you could manage to clasp your hands round my neck—do you think you could?—I could get you home. You will be ill if you stay here longer."

He got her into his arms, and himself upon his feet, somehow, and began to breast the hill. All the time his teeth were tightly clenched. He loathed himself because, in spite of himself, the sense of her nearness was dear to him. His heart, during the weeks he had painted her, had been like a slumbering volcano. Without warning it had burst into a tur-

moil. He despised himself because he was attracted by a beautiful body, and asked no questions of the slumbering soul within. It was only what thousands of his fellow-creatures did, but from himself he felt he had expected something different.

When at length he reached the farm he carried her upstairs and laid her on his own bed, because it was the handiest thing to do.

Then he woke Miss Scottie and rode away for the doctor.

Cathie was desperately ill. For weeks she lay on the borderland. Only her wonderful constitution pulled her through.

"A severe shock to the nervous system," was the cause, the doctor said; and this had been followed by rheumatic fever. But what caused the nervous shock no one knew—whether she had tried to drown herself and failed; whether she had merely fainted underneath the spreading thorn and been mercifully rescued from drowning by Montague, nobody knew. Nobody could guess at all, excepting one man, and he guessed. He knew.

Details, of course, he did not know; but as the girl grew stronger, and was able to lie on the sofa downstairs, and then to creep into the yard for the warm spring sunshine, he watched her furtively. At first he had intended leaving the farm next day; but he told himself he would not be a coward—he would live the thing down. If it was a thing to be strangled, he would strangle it; if it was a thing to

foster,—but thought took him no further—beyond was delirium.

So he stayed and he watched Cathie furtively—so furtively that no one suspected it. And he found out—by instinct, perhaps, for he very rarely saw her close; but at any rate he became possessed of Cathie's secret—in part. She loved. Beyond that a nightmare of doubt tormented him.

One day he saw her from the window of the room he called his studio pass through the farm-gate and under the elms. Here she strolled for a while with head bent and downcast eyes—a poem. After a while she sat down on the twisted root of the farthest elm, and leant her chin upon her hand and sighed. He knew she sighed; he could fancy that he saw her bosom heave, though indeed, good as his sight was, he could not have. Anyway he saw her sigh in fancy, and it is a fact that she sighed in reality.

And so he saw her many days. Always she passed the same way, and sat and sighed. And always her eyes were in the one direction, and that direction was Upcott Hall. And he began to build up his own story, bit by bit, and piece by piece. And no one suspected that he was doing anything but painting.

The farm, indeed, was a charming residence now. It was crammed with old oak; its draughty doors were sheltered with heavy curtains; its old kitchen was converted into the most delightful of morning

rooms; it was absolutely charming,—every one said so; and the country waived Madge's peculiarities once more, and called. Montague's man-servant presided with dignity in the back regions, and his wife served dinner with a French effect, in spite of the lack of appliances.

Madge grumbled it was not a bit like she meant it to be, but in her heart of hearts she was very glad. A month of farm life had been ample. It was now more than a year since her brother had thrown in his *ménage* with hers, and she welcomed him back warmly, and was thankful to escape so easily out of her last craze, and that, too, without giving herself away.

"Do you know what that stupid Cathie wants to do?" said Madge one afternoon.

To tell the honest truth, Madge was not very fond of Cathie, but during her illness she had felt sorry for her. Their natures, however, were too widely different ever to admit of any real warmth of feeling between them in their present difference of station. Madge hated sick-rooms, but she had conquered her aversion, and had spent many hours reading aloud to Cathie. Tears of wounded pride had welled over Cathie's eyes when she first listened to Madge. For the reading aloud brought back to her these happier hours, when she and Temple had sat on the grassy hillside, starred with daisies, and she had felt her power over him grow with the lengthening hours. But he had

not loved her sufficiently to make the one little sacrifice necessary—to face the world with her.

"What?" asked Montague, but without taking his eyes from his canvas.

"I don't suppose you're sufficiently interested in her to care to hear. I'm sure I'm not. She really annoys me. One would think she was a princess in disguise—or a genius."

Montague said nothing except—

"How do you like that? Rather charming, isn't it, with that quaint piece of cob-wall, and the row of beehives—then the arch beyond, and the pump. I never felt so grateful to you for anything in my life, Madge, as for settling here."

"Really? Well, I am glad. Yes; it's a lovely bit—but you want a figure."

"Hm—I was afraid I did."

"Why not use Cathie?"

"No; I don't want her."

"How queer! Now I should have thought you would have been taking her in every possible position. However, if she's going away, of course you can't."

"Is she going away? I'm not sure I've got that perspective right. It's awkward, though it doesn't look so."

There was several minutes' silence while Montague measured the different points of his canvas.

Madge dawdled back to the house, but Montague painted till sunset

"Madge has told you, I suppose?" said Miss Scottie, when he came into the house.

"Told me what?"

"About Cathie."

"What; going, you mean? Well, she's no good here, is she? I notice she always appears to have done that which she ought not, and to have left undone that which she, &c., &c."

"She wants to go to a boarding-school."

"A what?"

"A boarding-school."

"H'm—to be an educated miss, I suppose?"

"No; to be an educated lady."

"Is that what she says?"

"Yes, that's her idea. What shall I do?"

"What can you do? You're not her guardian. Besides, why shouldn't she go?"

But when Montague got upstairs he paced his narrow apartment with uneasy strides. She was going away? Why was she going? She was going to be educated. Why? They would lose sight of her. What would her end be?

He shuddered.

"When is Cathie going?" he asked at dinner.

"She says she doesn't quite know—she can't make up her mind exactly."

And Montague said to himself, "She cannot go till she has seen some one." And he watched her.

Then she suddenly announced—

"I'm a-gwin in to Upcott for larn o' the school-missus!"

This news was in due time passed on to Montague.

"She had better live out here with us," he said, "and walk in every day. I don't like the idea of her going out friendless into the world."

"Even Robert spoils her," thought Madge.

Aloud she said—

"There is no school there for her except the Church school, and Mrs Eliot refused her long ago—that's why we had to take compassion on her."

"Why did Mrs Eliot refuse her?"

"She wasn't quite so idiotically quixotic as Cocksey—I suppose that's why."

"Well, if she pays for her schooling I see nothing quixotic in teaching her."

"No; well, she'd have to live with Mrs Eliot. I can speak from experience, there's enough quixotism in a week of that to last a lifetime. She was no use in the house at all—besides being a most awful bore. She used to come into our sitting-room and sit down with the greatest composure—she did really—and pick out tunes on my piano. Oh! it was unbearable. I hated it. I don't believe in being quixotic—I shall never be it again."

When an opportunity came Montague addressed Miss Scottie on the subject.

"She could learn plenty at the Church school if she wants to," said he. "And you say she means

to spend what money she has on education, so really I don't see that Mrs Eliot need object. You might call and see her about it."

"Oh, my dear, anything to please you and dear Madge, but not *that*! I called once before, and I felt I made a great mistake. Now, if *you* were to call."

Montague moved uneasily.

"I couldn't very well; you know what people are. It would get about at once that I was educating the girl for myself."

"But what use would she be to you?" cried Miss Scottie.

"They would say, perhaps, I was educating her to be my wife."

Miss Scottie covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, what a wicked, wicked world!" she groaned.

"It would never do for me to take the least apparent interest in her. We've been too quixotic already. Now she could attend the Church school surely without exciting the least remark."

Miss Scottie fingered her fancy work uneasily. Then a bright thought struck her.

"Send her away from here to a boarding-school for trades-people!" she cried. "We could easily find such an one."

"She won't go away," said Montague.

"Have you asked her, my dear?"

"No; but I know she wouldn't; at least"—checking himself—"you had better ask her."



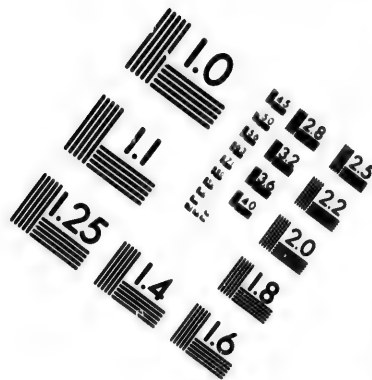
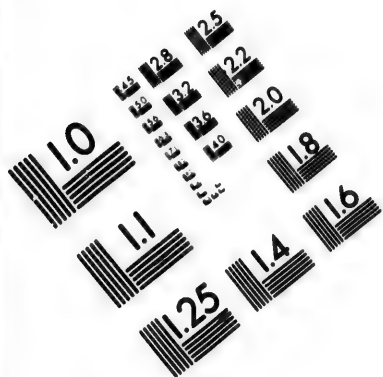
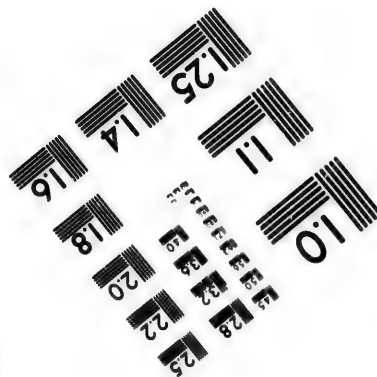
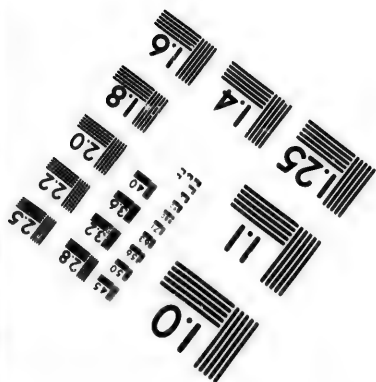
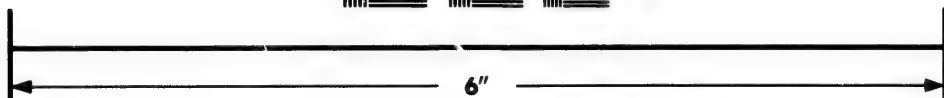
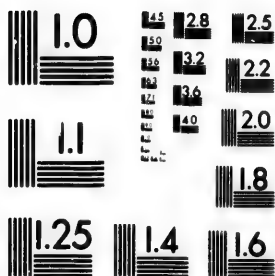


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Miss Scottie did ask her. Cathie firmly refused. She came back and told Montague.

"You ask her too," she said. "Perhaps she would if you asked her."

"She would not do it for me more than for any one else," said Montague. "Did she give any reason for not going away?" he asked suddenly.

"No—none."

"You might call in and see the rector of Upcott; he might arrange something," suggested Montague.

"I might," said Miss Scottie, doubtfully; and this she finally ended by doing.

The rector undertook to ask Mrs Eliot if she would be so good and kind as to let Cathie learn with the children.

"I've brought her here for you to see," he finished. "She's just outside."

And that altered the complexion of things. The brilliant intelligent eyes hunting for knowledge, went straight to Mrs Eliot's heart. And she undertook the task.

"You'll have to house her here a bit longer, Madge," said Montague. "We could not very well shove her off. You began to be quixotic, and now you'll have to go on with it."

"As long as she don't join our tea-parties," said Madge.

"I confess I see nothing forward in her," said Montague.

"No, she's afraid of you, I suppose; but before

you came she led me and Cocksey a dance, I can tell you!"

So Cathie walked in to Upcott school every day. And very soon Mrs Eliot began to take a deep pleasure in her keen desire for knowledge, her simplicity, her delicate ways, her gentle feelings—for all these were Cathie's when she reached an atmosphere where she was understood.

And Mrs Eliot understood her. She was a woman of ready sympathy, and she did her utmost to push her eager scholar forward.

For Cathie was still eager. Many waters cannot quench love. In the dim future, if she could fit herself for the post, Temple would come back to her, she told herself. She did not blame him, except for not believing sufficiently in her cleverness to feel that in time she could fit herself for the position which he occupied. Well! she would prove to him she could.

Meanwhile no boat rowed across the changing river.

Temple had gone for a trip round the world.

And after a while Cathie stayed altogether with Mrs Eliot, and 'Postle Farm knew her no more.

CHAPTER LIV.

CATHIE rapidly passed the Standards. Learning was no trouble to her.

Her magnificent physique enabled her to study for long hours without fatigue, and her quick brain grasped subjects at a glance, which the less intelligent have often to struggle over for an indefinite period.

She paid Mrs Eliot regularly the sum they had agreed upon—for Cathie had insisted her education should not be free,—she felt no anxiety about money. Lord Frobisher had told her to come for more when that was gone: besides, there were Grandfer's savings.

Mrs Eliot soon found her exceedingly useful. She helped her in the school, taking the younger classes at first, then gradually working her way up to the higher standards. Nothing escaped her, nothing was hard to her; nothing, except—her Devonshire! How it clung to her! How it seemed part and parcel of her tongue! The moment she was interested or startled the old words slipped out. It

seemed as if her tongue could never shape itself to any other language. Yet she attacked it with indomitable pluck. She was never disheartened.

And the town began to talk about her, and the county grew interested. But Cathie worked on quietly at her books, and heeded them not.

And something new came into the girl's beautiful face, just as sunlight streams into a room—only the sunlight leaves it when the daylight fades; but that which came into Cathie's face came to stay.

Every day she climbed the ridge behind 'Postle Farm, and looked down on the twelve stately elms, standing straight and true, like heroes in the battle; but no pendant flew to beckon her in the breeze. Yet she never went home dissatisfied,—the buoyancy that had forsaken her for a while had returned to her.

To Mrs Eliot she grew very dear—she had understood her from the first: why should not the girl choose her own station in life? So the months glided by.

One day Mrs Eliot and Cathie received an invitation to take tea at 'Postle Farm. Cathie did not wish to go: she shrank from the painful memories the old place would awaken. But Mrs Eliot persuaded her, and they went.

The invitation was entirely due to Lady Gamble, who was anxious to see the farm girl her niece was taking such an interest in. Not for the world would she have called at Mrs Eliot's for this purpose. She

was very much annoyed at the whole proceeding, but her curiosity led her to investigate the matter—only her niece was not to know the meeting was prearranged.

There was really nothing Lady Gamble so thoroughly enjoyed as bringing out a good-looking or a clever girl. To discover beauty and genius, irrespective of birth, and thrust her discovery into the gaping mouths of the county, was a situation she revelled in. But Cathie's birth was a little too exceptional even for Lady Gamble.

It was a beautiful afternoon when Lady Gamble's carriage rolled into the old farm-yard. The cows lowed at her over the stone wall, for it was near their milking-time, and the footman descended and rapped with his knuckles on the door, and the immaculate man-servant, imported by Montague, bowed her ladyship ceremoniously into the kitchen.

"Well, I'm blowed, if ever!" said the coachman, as he turned the carriage round to find standing-room in the barn. "These 'ere bloomin' gentry choose odd kind o' games."

"You, Lady Gamble!" cried Madge, who had been coached. "Mrs Eliot is here too."

"Why ever don't you have the hedges cut, my dear?" cried Lady Gamble. "Gregory says they scratch the carriage to pieces. I know they nearly tore my bonnet off my head! You must have them cut."

"We can't," said Madge. "It's called Scratch Face Lane."

"My dear Margaret," said Lady Gamble, as soon as tea was over and Miss Scottie and Madge had taken Cathie to see the stock, "you often told me about her—and I wouldn't believe half you said! But listen to me, you may swear black's white, but that girl's got good blood in her veins! She never got that carriage, that manner, from a farm! Beauty of a certain type one sees in that class repeatedly. Heaven forbid I should disparage it—it would never do in these Communist days—but without intending any disrespect to that class at all, that girl's type of beauty is *never* found save, and save only, where the blood has been crossed with the aristocracy of the land! Do you not agree with me, Mr Montague?"

"Well, I confess I have had some suspicion of the sort in her case!"

"You have? Of course you have! You're a sensible man. You know we don't gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles!"

"Oh, you are quite wrong!" cried Mrs Eliot. "Of course since I took up this work of village teaching I have been thrown so much with her class, and I assure you I have over and over again met with a delicacy of feeling, an intuitive knowledge, that you often do not find equalled and rarely excelled in the class that is foolishly termed, above them!"

"Of course you do!" said Lady Gamble. "There is plenty of cross-blood in most villages!"

"Ah, but there the parents are, simple honest people!"

"Yes, yes, that is all very well," said Lady Gamble; "but have you, in one of these intuitive cases you speak of—have you traced the descent back for generations through plebeian blood? There you are, you see! Allow me to state that good blood, and good blood only—I don't care if it's half a hundred generations back—but it's the best blood only that turns out a girl like—who is it? What's her name? Cathie—Cathie Vithycott—Pugsley—pshaw! Cathie Fiddlesticks; she's no more a Tythycott proper than I am!"

Lady Gamble lay back in her chair and tossed her head, first at one listener, then at the other.

"Certainly," said Mrs Eliot, "Cathie is simply a world of surprises. She learns so fast, she almost frightens me, and she seems to have been born with an absolute knowledge of the correct thing to do."

"Of course she was," said Lady Gamble. "Now, my dear Margaret, do for goodness sake make her drop that Devonshire. It's awful, isn't it?" appealing to Montague.

"Yes, she might pass for any one till she opens her mouth!" said he, laughing.

Mrs Eliot laughed too.

"Poor, dear girl, she does try so hard!" she said.

"What ever made her take this education freak into her head?"

"Ah! that I don't know," said Mrs Eliot. "When she begins, in that charming open way of hers, to talk, you think she is going to tell you everything, but when it's over you find she really has told you very little."

"Does she ever hint any mystery about her birth?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs Eliot; "there is none."

"Well, if you can make her talk plain English, you'll do more than I ever expect to see. You're a goose to undertake it."

As Mrs Eliot and Cathie walked home together, Cathie said—

"I like mixing with real gentry folk."

"We don't say gentry folk," said Mrs Eliot, who had strict orders from Cathie to correct her in every particular. "We say, well-bred people."

"Dear heart! and it really matters? Well, it is interesting—and, yes, absurd!"

These little differences of expression between the classes amused her immensely.

Next day Lady Gamble called on her niece.

"Now, what are you going to do about the girl?" she asked.

"Let her stay with me, just as long as she is inclined to."

"You can't possibly. The girl would be in a false position."

"I don't see that!"

"You never see anything that's plain and practical, that's one thing! Things that everybody else sees, you can't. The girl ought to go away somewhere and be properly educated, and then married to one of the more respectable artisan class—or a clerk."

Her niece smiled at her.

"You know you don't think that, aunt!" she said.

"Well, I think she should be educated away from here, any way—and then some one who is an authority in these matters——"

"Yourself, for instance!" interrupted Mrs Eliot.

"Should run down," continued Lady Gamble, ignoring her, "and see how she's shaping, and order her course accordingly."

Mrs Eliot sighed.

"I've no doubt you're right," she said; "but I've grown fond of her. I don't like the idea of losing her. There is no hurry for the present, any way. I'll educate her till she knows all I know—that's economical, and at the same time pleasant for me."

"I thought you said she paid you?"

"So she does, but I leave you to imagine whether it's a large sum."

"Well, it's economical; but still she oughtn't to stay with you. I don't believe at all in thrusting people out of the class to which they belong. Her head will be turned."

"No one's head is turned when they come into

the sphere they were created for! It's only when they are forced into a position by a misguided leader of society."

"That's why I want her to go away. Whether her head's turned or not then won't matter to us," said Lady Gamble. "We can stop short before the mischief's done, but if you keep her here, and get that absurd heart of yours entangled—well, there'll be trouble all round, that'll be the end of it."

"If she stays with me, I can watch her every day, and if I see her getting beyond herself, remove my sympathy and help—and recommend her going into domestic service." She burst out laughing. "You know, aunt," she finished, "it's ridiculous—you'll never tie her down to the common-place. She's bound to make a leader of something. Look at her violin-playing alone! No, no, she has a future, and I'm not going to lose my hold of her!"

"Violin's good, is it?"

"Well, *I* think it beautiful—but then I'm no judge."

"Then I'm no nearer the truth than I was."

"Well, you can take my opinion for what it's worth."

"On your own estimate? that's worth nothing, you say; and, candidly, Margaret, I don't know whether you're an authority on music or not—I only remember the Colonel wasn't. The fact is, you're an unsatisfactory person to have the manage-

ment of this girl, and I wish with all my heart you'd hand her over to one of her own class!"

"My dear aunt, they wouldn't understand her a bit! She's very queer sometimes. She's painfully imaginative. I'm always in terror she'll influence Laury!"

"Influence him? How!"

"Why, make him tell fibs."

"Does she tell fibs?"

"Not consciously; but she imagines things, you know—and children pick things up so easily."

"I always supposed imagination a natural gift—bestowed by the good fairies at one's birth. I didn't know it could be picked up like a germ. I think I shall try and pick it up."

"Well, I mean, it's imagination in Cathie; but in Laury it would be fibs, because he wouldn't see the things really,—he'd only say he did because Cathie did!"

"Let me see: imagination in Cathie—fibs in Laury—and, if I caught it, a still further deterioration, I suppose! Dear me! It's like influenza in the head of the house, and head colds in the women, and nothing more than ill-temper in the domestics. You really are ridiculous, Margaret. You've begun already to hedge that girl in with a kind of divinity, to the exclusion even of your own offspring. I see you'll make a failure of the whole thing!"

Mrs Eliot smiled quietly.

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BOOK IV.

THE AWAKENING

CHAPTER LV.

WHEN Temple left Cathie and rowed himself back, the fierce passion burnt itself out slowly, and in the sober morning light he found his self-respect was gone.

He was very wretched. To lose satisfaction in one's self is a very unpleasant thing.

One has to live with one's self, and to live with any one who has thoroughly displeased you is about as unpleasant a thing as can be done. So to improve this state of things Temple turned his displeasure from himself to Cathie.

How little she had really loved him! How little she had trusted him! With her hand in his, she had, at the last moment, drawn back. It was really the loaves and the fishes she wanted after all. She wanted to be established at Upcott Hall. He bit his lips till the blood came. She had deceived him from the first, and mocked him at the last. This experience he had entered on

with such a light heart had ended disastrously for him. He had always had a faint suspicion it might end disastrously for the girl. But she was safe—while he! God, what a wreck of a man he was! His love for Cathie had been tortured into hatred. Yes; he hated her—he was sure he did. Here he stood, with love played out, and scarcely one instant's satisfaction in it. He had thought—he would have staked his life on it indeed—that he loved Cathie with a love that could never diminish. He had looked forward to a far future, when, though unrecognised by the world, she would still be to him the best, the dearest. And now! love was already dead. He felt nothing but anger. She had been ungrateful; she had been heartless; she had amused herself at his expense. He had thought she would pour out the riches of her love upon him, and dare anything for his sake. She had poured out nothing; she had dared nothing. It had all been a horrible affair, and his fingers had been badly burnt.

He was very wretched. He had thought beyond a doubt that he absolutely loved crazy Cathie. True, he had not thought so till she parted the boughs of their bower, and stood before him after an absence of many weeks. It had rushed upon him then that he must love her henceforth and for ever. And now! Yet, surely, what he had felt at that moment was love. If so, then, why had it

not lasted? Temple was still young, and had not fully grasped the fact that even heart emotions may prove only transitory.

Since what he had felt for Cathie had not been love, how was he to know love? How was any one to know love?

Until he met Cathie he had thought he loved Elsie. Was he to go through life like this? Always under the impression he had met the one girl of his heart, until misfortune threw another in his path, whom he loved rather better. It must be stopped—it was degrading. He would go away at once and propose to Elsie, and finish the whole business.

But he had lost all confidence in himself. How could he be sure marriage would prove a seal to his actions? In the case of Cathie, he had acted in the most inconsequent way. Well, he would be on his guard now, so that he should not act inconsequently again.

Yet when he thought of marriage with Elsie he felt too utterly dispirited to go through with it. No; the best possible thing he could do was to go away, and forget everything for a while.

He would speak to Lord Frobisher, and see if he would let him have the necessary cash for a trip round the world. He did not suppose he would like the suggestion,—nor did he. Eventually, however, he consented, and Temple started

globe-trotting, in search of his lost self-respect, and to learn exactly, if possible, when an emotion of the heart means love, and when it only means something transient as a dewdrop, and much less transparent.

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CHAPTER LVI.

THE months that followed Temple's departure were unhappy ones to Elsie. She had expected him, even if he did not favour her with an open declaration, to give her some sure sign that his heart was hers. But he had left her without giving her any reason to believe that he eventually meant to make her his wife.

Mrs Clavers did not improve matters by openly expressing her disapprobation of his conduct.

"If there is a class of young men I more thoroughly despise than another," she said severely, "it is the class that leads girls on, and then make their escape to the Continent. I shall refuse him the house if he dares to return!"

"I am sure he never lead me on. I never dreamt for a moment he meant anything," said Elsie; for even the most truthful girls are apt, under some circumstances, to make indignant denials that are contrary to their feelings. "The last thing I expected him to do was to propose."

"Then why this depression?" demanded Mrs Clavers.

Mrs Clavers had always been a very happy woman herself, and she could not understand unhappiness in others. She was a little inclined to think happiness is of one's own choosing. It annoyed her to think Elsie had had an unfortunate love-affair; it did not excite her sympathy. She was disposed to think her own happiness was not bestowed by a gracious Providence, but rather by her own intervention. She regarded health in the same way. If her daughter were ill she was quite annoyed, and resented all kind inquiries. She had never been ill. Why should Elsie be?

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CHAPTER LVII.

LADY GAMBLE had a nephew. He had happened to drop in in a friendly way at 'Postle Farm on the afternoon Cathie had been asked there.

When a woman is particularly beautiful a man's love for her is more or less conceived at first sight. He desires her as we all desire the beautiful, though often but imperfectly understanding wherein the beautiful consists. Provided he discovers no violent temper or hateful fault—or sometimes in spite of these—the little root of love, planted at that first meeting, blossoms and bears fruit—especially in the young and inexperienced heart.

Cyril Wain found a sudden charm in Upcott. The world to him became a changed world since the afternoon he drank tea at 'Postle Farm. He came often to the School Cottage, first on one pretext then another. He took to attending both morning and evening church there. If he bicycled, it was on the Upcott road. If he drove, if he walked, it was still the Upcott road. And often

he was rewarded by a glimpse of Cathie, or even by a few sentences exchanged with her.

"I cannot think why Mr Wain comes so often to Upcott now," said Mrs Eliot, one day as she and Cathie were sitting at breakfast.

"You know as well as I do," said Cathie, calmly.

"It is your duty, dear, to discourage him," said Mrs Eliot, when she had recovered from the first surprise.

"I know."

No more was said.

That evening, as Mrs Eliot, Cathie, and Laury were returning from taking a stroll through the woods that bordered Upcott, they met Cyril.

Cathie walked on.

"I must make up for lost time," she said.

When Mrs Eliot came in a few minutes later, she found Cathie already at work.

"You are a good dear girl!" she said.

"Why should I want to jibber-jaw—talk, I mean—
—with he—him?"

One afternoon, as Cathie was putting on her hat to walk out, Mrs Eliot said—

"May I speak to you, dear? I have something important to say."

Cathie turned her dark eyes on Mrs Eliot with a curious expression and sat down.

"You have noticed," began Mrs Eliot, nervously, "that Mr Wain has—admires you very much."

Cathie yawned.

"He spoke to me to-day. I told him he must not dream of marrying you."

"I should think not!" said Cathie.

"I told him," continued Mrs Eliot, "that his aunt would never forgive me the blow. You have no feeling for him, dear, have you?" she almost pleaded.

"None."

"And you will not try to have? I know you are ambitious, and——"

"I'm not ambitious to marry the wrong man!" said Cathie.

"What have you against him? I am afraid it means your heart is already engaged somewhere else," said Mrs Eliot; "and although it helps me out of my present difficulty, I do hope your heart's choice has been wise."

"I didn' say I'd made a heart's choice!" said Cathie, frowning.

"You know, Cathie, dear, you are very incomprehensible, and I want to understand you, and it occurred to me you perhaps had an object in view for studying so hard. If you would just tell me a little about yourself, I might perhaps be able to help you."

Cathie was silent. She resented this cross-examination.

"You must not be angry with me, Cathie," said Mrs Eliot; "only I can't help feeling anxious about your future. I do hope, if you have given your

heart to any one, it is somebody you can depend upon."

To her surprise Cathie answered—

"I don't know as how I can."

"That does not sound very promising," said Mrs Eliot. "A man that cannot be depended on is hardly the man to make you a happy wife. Is he equal to you in station?"

"No," said Cathie, a mischievous light flashing in her eye. "But there! what's the odds o' that so long as I love 'n?"

"Is he what you call in these parts a good getter?"

"Very," said Cathie, emphatically.

"But he is not your equal? Then surely your education is a desperate mistake?"

"I alway loved learnin', and wanted for know things before ever I met him. Of course if I get to know more'n he, I can teach un it—see?"

"When you said he was not your equal did you mean in character or station?"

"I reckon when a girl loves she don't think the man she's lovin' not equal to her in character, anyway!"

"You said he was not to be depended upon, and not your equal in station. I'm afraid, Cathie, you have not much chance of happiness," said Mrs Eliot, sadly. "Promise to do nothing definite without consulting me," she said, after a pause. "I think you owe this to me."

Cathie hesitated.

"Well," she said at last, grudgingly, "p'raps I won't, but I can't promise."

"Let me implore you," Mrs Eliot cried, in the words of Temple, "never to marry beneath you. It would bring you intense misery. There is no middle course. You will not be kind to me, Cathie, if you undertake so important a step without first consulting me."

Cathie rose to her feet restlessly. Then, with a sudden smile, she turned to Mrs Eliot and said—

"I'll promise you one thing—I won't marry beneath me without telling you first."

Mrs Eliot shook her head as Cathie left the room.

She began to think perhaps Lady Gamble's advice to educate her elsewhere was best. The school-mistress was returning shortly, and Mrs Eliot felt Cathie would be an inconvenience to her when she resumed her ordinary life.

As they were sitting together next evening, she said—

"It would be a good experience for you, Cathie, to go to school at Exeter."

"No," said Cathie; "I'll bide where I be!"

"Stay where I am," corrected Mrs Eliot.

"No! no!" said Cathie, almost passionately; "bide where I be!" and she got up abruptly, and outside, in the little dusky garden, she dashed away the hot tears that had rushed to her eyes.

"Bide where I be!" she repeated determinedly. "Ay, ay, from now to Michaelmas, and from Michaelmas to now—year in, year out, I'll bide where I be; and if he never comes—if I never see him! Ah! but he will, he will! I shall! If I bide where I be, I shall surely see him one day!"

And half a hundred miles away a man and woman walked together and plighted their troth.

And the man remembered a past that for a brief season had seemed beautiful, but was now dust and ashes, fast being pressed into the limbo of forgetfulness.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ONE evening Catherine was sitting in the garden studying, when the sound of horse's hoofs made her raise her head. She did it absently, rapidly conjugating a French verb the while.

Cyril reined in his horse, dismounted, and came up the little narrow garden-path. Catherine was annoyed at the interruption, but already too well-mannered to evince it. You cannot live in close daily contact with a gentlewoman for several months without reflecting her somewhat, unless you are unusually obtuse.

Cyril held in his hand a beautiful bunch of roses; these he held out to her, saying—

"I have brought you these. They looked so fresh, and their colour was so fine."

"Mrs Eliot will be pleased with them," said Cathie.

"Thank you very much."

"I brought them for you," he said.

"Ah, but you should not!" and she looked the young man full in the face, with an expression that was not far removed from motherly.

He was a straight-limbed, tall, fair young fellow, exceedingly unlike his aunt. He was the sort of fellow one knows instinctively had a gentle, well-bred woman for his mother; and one knows also he will never shame her.

"Why should I not?" he said. "May I sit out here a little while, or are you busy?"

"Not busier than usual," she answered, smiling; "but when a body's close on fifteen years behind with an education, it tak's a bit o' time to make it up like. Now, what did I say wrong in that?"

"Oh, nothing!" he answered fervently.

"Ah," she said, "you're not kind! you won't tell!"

"Doesn't it bore you to death to be caught up every time you speak?"

"No, because I want to learn — I must learn. The people it bores to death is them as has to catch me up. Now, what's there wrong in that?"

"Don't come to me to tell you. I like your English just as it is."

"Do you really?" she asked, leaning forward with a sudden eagerness. Then her face fell a little, and she sighed, and did not heed his answer.

"Now, will you hear me this?" she asked, holding out a French book of poetry. "I like French — seems like my native tongue."

"What! like Devonshire?"

"And why not? Didn't the French hang about this western coast a deal? Ah, but my Devonshire!

"Why do I love un so?" She suddenly covered her face with her hands. "And what good will it bring me breaking of it off? sometimes I ask; sometimes I wonder."

There were tears in her eyes.

"Look at me," she said; "ain't I silly? I wonder was ever any one in this world a-satisfied? I wonder if everybody ain't always a-longing for something they an't got?"

It had grown dusk, and she rose and led the way into the cottage.

"There be that moth in the candle; fancies he wants more light, and it only burns him. P'raps I'm like the moth. Sometimes I get cruel discouraged. However, I ain't goin' to give in. Hear us the poetry, will 'ee?"

And the young man sat holding the tattered French poetry book, the candlelight falling full on his clear, wholesome skin; and near him sat Cathie in her white gown, and leaning forward with her hands clasped, while she laboriously repeated French poetry.

One could picture for the young man a touchingly simple old age,—grandchildren about his knees; but for the girl it was difficult to picture a future. The eyes, all fire and softness, the determined chin, the strangely expressive mouth, the delicate nostril, haughty and refined, the ambition expressed in the magnificent poise of the head. Hers was a future none could gauge.

There was a step outside on the gravel. The door stood wide open, and with a "May I come in?" Montague entered. He had come for a book Mrs Eliot had promised to lend Madge.

It was as if a strong magnetic current passed through Cathie. Anything that reminded her of 'Postle Farm made her heart beat faster. She rose to her feet, and stood confronting Montague, and for a moment or two neither spoke. It was the first time Cathie had ever consciously observed him.

"If I had a trouble I'd tak' it to un," was the thought that flashed through her mind.

And then the slow smile broke upon her face—the smile that had once sent Temple's heart a-beating, and now caused poor Cyril, looking up from the tattered leaves of the French poetry book, to swallow hard a couple of times, and set his teeth.

CHAPTER LIX.

MEANWHILE Temple had returned from his globe-trotting. He had shot for two months on the Rocky Mountains; he had lived a gay life in New York, and the American belles had shed their dazzling light upon him; he had toiled in the mines of Australia, and idled on the hills of Bombay. Of women, however, he had all the while been distinctly afraid. When he looked into handsome eyes he was fearful lest they should lure him into a semblance of love. But as time passed he plucked up courage, and when he set foot again on English shore, and found himself once more in the presence of Elsie Clavers, he asked himself—

“What can I do better than marry her if she will have me?”

So one afternoon, about a fortnight after his return, he asked the momentous question, and received the momentous answer.

Mrs Clavers was radiant; but, afraid of appearing too much so, she let fly little sarcasms at Temple, which he tried to bear unflinchingly, but which

nevertheless, found out the weak places in his armour, and made him wince.

Elsie was quite a different kind of woman. She covered him with her loving confidence, and wrapped him in a wonderful halo of perfection, and poured out her simple affection almost with the artlessness of a child. And Temple received it all, and tried to think himself blessed beyond all blessing, rich beyond all measure.

But his heart was a miserable dead thing, and he knew it. The fire, the passion, was swept away. It was not even an empty vessel, or then there might have been hope. It was a vessel full to the brim, but the contents were frozen.

Some people grow old so gently—here a little and there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept—that they have no notion of advancing time till they suddenly find themselves on the table-land of middle age. The smiling valley of youth lies far below them, and the steep mountain summit before them.

Others, on the contrary, can remember the very hour, the precise moment, when youth left them. They can point unerringly to just the spot on the mounting path where the step lost its lightness and the heart its *âme*. So it had been with Temple.

It was an understood thing that his engagement with Elsie must continue till Lord Frobisher's death. Mrs Clavers was firm on this point. She remem-

bered the old adage, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." She did not intend Elsie to marry a pauper.

To Temple his long engagement was a purgatory. If only he could settle down into a quiet married life all would be well, he felt.

He wanted to be happy and light-hearted, and he usually succeeded in making people think him so. But when he was alone Fate weighed upon him. He had kept his return to England a secret from Lord Frobisher for three weeks, and, on writing, Lord Frobisher wired him from Brighton. It was not until the following spring he was obliged to pay his dreaded visit to the Hall.

Yes; there it stood, with its old, grey, weather-beaten walls! For the first time after all his wanderings he saw it. His heart thumped against his side; his head was dizzy.

No, no; he had not behaved well to her! But then he had intended to behave better than hundreds of other men. He had not meant to do her any harm. Only he had suddenly ceased to love her,—that was the dreadful part. However closely he had adhered to the programme he had marked out for himself, in the very fact of his ceasing to love her the injury was done—the woman was wronged.

If he ceased to love her because she had refused

to throw in her life with his, what would have happened had she poured out the fulness of a loving heart to him?

Along the beaten path of such life-sacrifices, we know what happens. And as Temple stood and faced the frowning walls of the old farm, he tried to thresh the subject out. Would the old happy content never come back to him? What had he done to forfeit it? He had not sinned!

And whose fault was it that he had not sinned?

"Cathie, Cathie!" he cried brokenly, for the first time facing the whole truth of the matter. "You were too good for me! I did not deserve you, and I lost you! You were infinitely far above me! I could not reach you. I have lost you now—for even, if you could forgive me, I am no longer free to ask it!"

Heaven had stooped and given him love; he had turned aside, and love must perish.

CHAPTER LX.

TEMPLE looked out from his bedroom window. He must go and tell her all. It was only fair to her that he should explain. But his mentor told him no. He must write.

He knew in his own secret soul, to meet her now would be madness. He dreaded, above all things, his courage failing; and he tried, with all the strength of his nature, to keep his thoughts from dwelling on her.

It was early spring. Dazzling clouds floated over the radiant sun at rapid intervals, and cast over the shining landscape shadows like dimples on the cheek of laughter. Temple told himself, with a persistency that argued otherwise, that he was not thinking of the old farm, nor even of Cathie.

Suddenly he found himself picturing how it would look under the changing aspect of the day. He shot a quick, almost feverish, glance across the river.

The white wings of a sea-gull fluttered against the

grey walls for an instant, like the spirit of love seeking rest and finding none, and the sunlight flashed for one brilliant instant on its wings. Then came shadow.

To get away from temptation he ordered a horse and rode into Upcott. He put his horse up at the "Long Bider" inn, with the intention of looking through the papers in the Free Library. But he was too restless to sit and read. He got up and walked through the larch wood that led to the high road.

The larches, for him, were not there. The old grey farm was before him, with its windowless walls that faced the river, and the grey green hill stretching below and above.

Then suddenly Cathie stood before him. At first, in the glamour of his own imagination, he thought his brain had conjured her there. He started back. Then he understood. He was too much enthralled by the fact that it was she, to notice the wonderful change in her appearance.

"Cathie!" he cried. Then he finished hoarsely, "I am not free. I belong to some one else!"

She turned white to the lips—slowly—as though the thought were getting nearer and nearer to her heart.

"Forgive me!" he groaned. "I was mad. I was worse—a fool. All this while I never knew. Then suddenly I understood. I knew then I wanted nothing in all the world but you to be my wife! But it's too late—too late!"

She stood so still,—only looking at him with eyes that seemed to read his soul.

"For God's sake say something!" he gasped. "Say you hate me! say you despise me—or, best of all, if you only could—say you forgive me! Oh!" he cried, turning away, "what a loathsome hound I've been!"

He felt her arms about him.

"Do you forgive me?" he cried; and though the blood coursed through his veins he would not take the kiss he craved.

Then her arms stole upwards as she answered, speaking slowly and with difficulty—

"There is no forgiveness in love. It has nothing to forgive!"

And ere the words had quite left her parted lips, he kissed her.

She was weeping. Not with sorrow. The sorrow of it all was at that moment blotted out with the exceeding joy that he was ready to make her his wife—yes; though she were only a farm-girl in rags. He had spoken for her, and she did not doubt him. He had come to her desiring nothing but to call her his. And she had wanted this. She had wanted him to love her for the soul that was within her, and the poor trappings of the body she had wanted to slip from his sight and fall in ashes at his feet. This is how women like to be loved, and how men never love. Women who

want it, want what is impossible, and when Temple overlooked Cathie's birth, her rags, her education, he overlooked as much as one could expect a man to. Had Cathie been less beautiful Temple would never have wanted to call her his.

He loved her for her soul ; but he loved her also for the beautiful casket that held it.

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CHAPTER LXI.

CATHIE walked home in a bewildered state. For eighteen months she had been working ardently for Temple, and now she could never bring the rich offering of her patience to his feet. He belonged to another. It was beyond her power just then to grasp the thought. It was like the sudden discharge of a cannon close at hand that leaves one stunned, and unable for the moment to identify the cause. Or it was to her as if she had been climbing laboriously up a steep hill, believing that at the summit a magnificent tableland would stretch before her, and as she reached the utmost crag and looked out with eager, gladdened eyes, beheld a bottomless abyss. She had reached the end of all things.

Mrs Eliot was startled by her quietude. After tea she had drawn out her books from force of habit, but she sat listless over them. Her eyes stared blankly on the page. Then suddenly the full tide of realisation swept upon her. Oh! it was too much, too much to bear! She could bear

much, but not this. Not to lose him, just as she was almost worthy of him. There was no compassionate God. There was no Lord who was mindful of her sorrows. All her life she had had nothing but taunts and gibes and bruises. She had been crushed and ground down under the heel of adversity. She would not be any longer. She would take her fate in her own hands. She started from her seat and swept the books to the floor. She stamped upon them with her feet. She was maddened with grief.

"She is crazy, as the country people said!" was Mrs Eliot's first thought, as she started trembling towards the girl.

"Don't, don't!" Cathie cried. "Keep away! I'm not responsible! I'm mad!"

Mrs Eliot shrank back in terror. She was alone in the cottage, and a great fear of Cathie fell upon her.

"Compose yourself, Cathie!" she said, trying to speak firmly.

"Compose myself! Yes; when your heart is bruised and torn and battered and kicked about from pillar to post. Compose yourself! Bah!"

This was madness. Mrs Eliot slipped to the door; she would run for the doctor. Fortunately for her beating heart the doctor's house was but a stone's throw from her own. She startled the inmates by peal after peal at the door bell. The doctor was giving a quiet dinner-party, in the

middle of which he had already been called out. Montague was of the party.

"Mrs Eliot!" he cried—the first to grasp the situation—and an awful pallor crept into his heart. "What is it?"

"Cathie!" she gasped, pointing in the direction of the schoolhouse. Montague waited for no more, —he ran.

He reached the schoolhouse just as Cathie flung open the door. She was going; she didn't know where, and she didn't care.

At the sight of him she paused, and he led her back.

"What is it?" he asked.

She looked and looked. Then she turned and sat down quietly.

"Yes, I'll tell 'ee," she said, with a little sob.

He sat down, too, and waited.

"I loved a man," she said at last. "God, how I loved un! He never meant me fair and straight, but I trusted un." Every particle of colour went out of Montague's face. The fear he had gradually put from him returned in a tide of conviction. She stopped a moment and pressed her hands together. "I trusted un," she repeated. "I felt so sure he'd come back to me. I kind of knowed he would. And to-day he came, but—not for me. He's married another!"

There was a long silence. Then she suddenly drew herself up and looked straight at Montague.

"An' what do I care?" she cried.

"You mustn't say that," said Montague. "You care very much. But you can live it down. You *must* care. If you cease to care you will lose your self-respect!"

"On the contrary, I shall keep it!" she answered, not understanding his thought. "I shall keep it!" she repeated, "but it hit me cruel hard!"

She rocked herself to and fro a minute, and the tears came.

"He was so gentle," she said, "and he always meant well by me—I know he did. But, somehow, he didn't know the stuff I was made on. He couldn't seem someways to see I'd a-got a determination to carry me through 'most any place. Queer, wasn't it? 'Cause he loved me—yet he couldn't tak' the measure o' me. He couldn't think I could work myself up, like, and be a lady. I know what a lady is, bless 'ee. 'Tisn't education an' fine clothes—it's the inward heart o' mun. An' I'd a-made all that for un because—well, of course, I just loved him. And he wasn't to blame because he couldn't see what I'd make of myself! That wasn't no fault of his! He thought I'd always bide as I was—just a rough farm-girl—so how could he marry me, thinking that?"

Montague made no answer.

"Supposing, now," said she, "I was a rough farm-maid, an' 'ee'd seen a lot o' me, an' knew me, an' loved me; well, now, would 'ee make a

wife o' me? 'Course not!" Then, after a moment's pause, very wistfully, "'Ee wouldn', would 'ee?"

"If I once felt you were the woman created for me, I should know your possibilities, and, in short, I should not hesitate," said Montague. "But that is entirely beside the question. You belong to another. I have known that from the first. It is not possible to judge one man's actions by another's. But this I will tell you,"—and he rose and clenched his fist, while the veins swelled in his forehead,—“If the man you are speaking of were here, no power on earth would stop me from taking him by the throat and breaking every bone in his body! He's a cur, and I'd shake him like a rat! He's a despicable mean hound, and I'd horsewhip him! I tell you that man's not fit to *touch* you—and, good God, what has he not done!"

He was too much agitated to notice the fury that blazed in her eyes. The first thing that recalled her presence was the icy cold tones of her voice.

"Have you quite finished? Because the door is there. It only needs opening."

"I spoke too hotly," he said, in quick self-reproach.

"You did. The man you spoke of is the man I love."

"Of course!" he said; "I had forgotten."

"If you forget again——"

"I know ; you will never speak to me after."

Already there was the sound of returning footsteps hurrying up the path.

"One thing only," said Montague, hurriedly ; "be true to yourself, to your higher instincts, and care for that man still, while you have a breath to breathe with. Never cheat yourself into believing that you don't. For God's sake give yourself to no other, unless it be to a man you respect."

Mrs Eliot threw open the door and entered with the doctor.

"She is better now," said Montague. "The attack has passed," and, without looking again in Cathie's direction, he shook hands with Mrs Eliot, and was about to leave, but Cathie riveted him. Standing up straight and firm she pointed to the door.

"I won't see no doctor," she said. "Either him or me goes out of that door."

Montague whispered a word to the doctor.

"My dear young lady," he said, "this isn't a professional visit." And he sat down and conversed with them both. He left shortly, assuring Mrs Eliot by many nods and signs that she had nothing to fear.

"I was just a-strivin' to mak' up my mind over something," said Cathie, when the door closed behind him. "And now I've done it, and I'll tell 'ee what 'tis. I'm mortal sick someways of learnin' here ; I'm going to London to learn."

The air of Upcott seemed to Cathie as if it would choke her. She felt she must go away until she had conquered some of the heartbreak within her.

"Going to London? That will be fearfully expensive! You will run through all your poor grandfather's savings in a year, and then what will happen?"

"I can get other money," she answered. "I've got other."

Mrs Eliot had learnt that when Cathie made up her mind to a thing it was useless to try and dissuade her. She therefore made no further objection, and she promised to find a suitable place for the girl to go to.

"If she were a man," she said to herself, "she would work her way up to a premiership. As a woman, I suppose, she will merely make a brilliant match."

CHAPTER LXII.

No thought of an onlooker had troubled Temple and Catherine when they met in the larch wood. They were too much absorbed in each other to be troubled by any outside thought. But a man at work amongst the fallen timber saw them.

"If I can't 'ave the me-aid myself, by — she shan't 'ave no other man 'fore I've shamed 'er for a witch," he cried, with his lowering gaze upon them. "'Er tricked me out o' a luck wi' Bessie, I always know 'er did! Ah, but if I could get 'er! Theer mus' be some'at 'bout 'er or thickey cussed clean shaver wouldn' be 'avin a dab for 'er. That old cuss Grandfer'd a-saved a middlin' pile, I knows. See 'ow the maid carr'es on wi' 'er learnin' an' 'er fiddle-ticks. See 'ow 'er clothies 'erself. I'll draw blood from 'er for a witch yet, see if I don't. 'Er b'ain't easy for skeer, I know, but I'll skeer 'er this time—I'll bet I will!"

This required management, and he set to work to do it. He wanted to get back into Mrs Mollard's good books; he wanted very much to

persuade her it was all along of "thickey avil-eyed witch Cathie" that he had dared to aspire to the hand of Bessie. If he could arrange to bring Cathie to Stibb Farm, just as Mrs Mollard was working the charm, she would believe him, and he — he would have the satisfaction of drawing blood from her as a witch, and breaking her power.

"'Ave 'ee stecked the 'eart wi' pins?" whispered Miah.

"Ees; an' I bey closin' of the doo-ors!" cried Mrs Mollard, trembling with excitement. "Us'll zee whether I can't pay 'er out or no vor what 'er 'ath a-done tøy me times an' over!"

She closed the door and bolted it. The baby was sleeping, the children were at a neighbour's, her husband at Fammelsea market. Trembling, she watched the red heart roast before the fire.

Miah had taken a message to Cathie that she was wanted at 'Postle Farm. The bullock, whose death lay at her door, he had driven to its death by a simple contrivance, all traces of which he had now removed.

Cathie walked forward unsuspectingly. As she reached the crown of the hill, she came face to face with Miah. He appeared to be hurried.

"If 'ee plase, Cathie," he said, "wüd 'ee kindly come along to Stibb Varm. Mrs Mollard's a-took bad, an' I'm a-rinnin' vor the doctor, eef 'ee'll

kindly walk on, as the chil'ern be all to school an' master not back from market."

A strong distaste for the task took possession of Catherine. "I must go; 'tis but human!" was her thought, and she turned aside to take the path across the fields. But the farther she went the more strong was her disinclination.

"She isn't ill at all!" she suddenly exclaimed. "'Tis some trick. I'll turn straight back!"

But she had already come some way. The grey mist had closed in over the hills, and the shades of evening were fast settling into night.

She turned abruptly and began to mount the hill. Presently she became aware of a figure before her. As she came near a voice said—

"Wull, why an't 'ee gone on?"

"Why an't 'ee?" she retorted.

"I met the doctor's gig, an' ee's comin' round by the road."

"Then I need not go on since he is coming," she answered.

"Ees, 'ee need," he answered, gripping her strongly by the wrist. "I bid 'ee to—so go!"

A sense of greater fear than she had ever known settled upon Catherine. She wrenched her arm from his grasp, and started backwards. Unconsciously she glanced round for protection.

"Luk 'ee 'ere," said Miah, recapturing her, and hissing the words close to her face; "'ee've got to go to Stibb Varm, or I'll mak' 'ee. They'll a-vetch

blood from 'ee vor a witch töy—vor that's what 'ee bey—an' all country-zide know'th it. Theer bey one way out o't. Swear to mar' me, an' I'll a-tak' 'ee back safe—vor you know, Cathie,"—here he changed his voice into wheedling tones,—“I was always mazed over 'ee. I always thought a zight on 'ee, my dear, you'm that 'andsome!”

Cathie met his bloodshot eyes and did not flinch.

“Miah Sluman,” she said, “you can't frighten me!” But though she spoke boldly, it was only by intense effort she kept from trembling. “I'll tell you this, though I wonder you don't know it without my telling you,—I'd die before I'd so much as stay one hour in the same spot with 'ee!”

She tried to push past him. But he stood in front of her. Then she realised her position was desperate.

It was on this same afternoon that Montague stood painting in his studio. Glancing out of the window as he turned to fetch a colour from his box on the window-sill, he saw Cathie standing on the ridge of the hill beckoning to him. It seemed to him at that moment as if this was what he had been expecting all his life.

Hastily putting down his palette and brushes, he turned from the room and mounted the hill to join her.

On the summit of the ridge the mist surrounded

him. It was a weird evening. Sudden gusts shook the hedgerows, or seizing one leaf, made it swirl ceaselessly, while all the rest were still. Shadows seemed to be fleeing at rapid intervals across his steps; yet the sun had long set, and the moon had not risen.

He quickened his steps: a sense of uneasiness weighed upon him. Suddenly a hare dashed across his path, and at the same instant night fell. It seemed to drop on him like a pall. He had reached the edge of the ridge now; but she had disappeared. What had she wanted? And why had she not waited till he came? He felt anxious and uncertain. However, there was nothing to be gained by standing in the dark. He must act. At that instant he heard his own name called twice, in accents of despair. A cold perspiration burst upon his forehead. There was an eerie feeling on the desolate hill, and he resented his inability to throw off the sense of danger that oppressed him.

He sprang forward. He seemed to be fighting an impenetrable wall of mist. Then suddenly, as once before he had heard it, a woman's scream rent the air. He felt his hair literally lift from his brow.

"Where? Where?" he called; and through the thick air his voice came back to him in muffled tones. He stopped to listen. There was a des-

perate stillness, broken only by his own laboured breathing.

Then he plunged forward, and hurled himself into space. His fingers gripped at something, then himself and another body rolled over and over down the grassy slope.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HE held on with his iron grip all the while. When the rolling ceased he was holding on still.

Then a woman's voice said, with gasping sobs—

"Oh, don't kill him! Your fingers are on his throat. For God's sake let go!"

Gradually his grip slackened. A choking, retching, writhing bundle lay on the grass.

"You damnable coward, what were you doing to this woman? Who is the woman?"

He turned: it was too dark to see now, but a woman crept into his arms and lay there. He knew who she was. She was trembling and sobbing.

"I will take this devil into custody when he gets over his choking fit," he said, presently.

"Let him go! Let him go!" she sobbed.

"I will not let him go," he answered.

"You must!"

Montague hesitated. But her will was strong.

"Get up, you hound!" he said.

And slowly the man staggered to his feet, and disappeared into the darknes

"Let me keep him!" cried Montague.

She shook her head. He could not see her face, for it was pressed against him; but he felt the movement.

He did not speak again, waiting till she should be calm. Contact with him brought her strength; she drew back from him.

"Come with me," he said, "and rest at 'Postle Farm."

"No, no, no!" she cried.

"But you cannot go home as you are. Tell me, are you hurt?"

"No."

"In no way?"

"No."

"Come back to the farm with me, and I will have you driven home."

"No, no, no!"

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Walk home. You come 'long with me."

"Tell me, who was it?"

"No, I won't!"

And Montague, tormented with doubts, drew her hand through his arm, and marched stolidly home with her. Twice he had heard her scream in the darkness — once he had heard the frantic straining of the oars, the second time he had his fingers on a man's throat. What was the meaning of this mystery? Naturally he connected the circumstances.

As he walked forward he felt something wet and warm on her wrist.

"What is this?" he cried.

"Blood!"

"Blood?"

He took the matches from his pocket and struck one. The blood was dripping from her arm, and above it her white scared face, with the wild eyes, looked up into his own.

"Cathie, Cathie!" he cried, "you told me you were not hurt!"

She began to whimper while he bound her arm up.

"Don't you tell anybody," she said; "that's what I'm thinkin'."

"But I must tell. Mrs Eliot will have to know."

She snatched away the hand he had just bound.

"Go, then," she said; "you're no friend. You may tell; but mornin' light won't find me."

"Then tell me about it," he said, "and I will tell no one."

"There's nothing to tell."

"As you will," he answered, wearily; and they tramped on.

This mystery of hers was torture to him.

"I wish you would tell me all about yourself," he said at last. "It would be much better."

"Myself's myself—and just my affair and no one else's."

"No," he answered, in a voice that shook a little in spite of himself; "when you meet people and bind them to you, your affair becomes theirs also. Remember you beckoned me to help you."

"I didn't!" she answered, indignantly.

"Excuse me, you stood on the ridge above Postle farm and beckoned me—or if you did not, it was your double."

She made no answer, and they concluded their journey in silence.

At the school cottage she put out both her hands to him.

"I ain't got no proper thanks. But though my tongue can't thank 'ee, my heart does."

She opened the cottage door, and stood for a moment with her beautiful figure silhouetted against the light within.

Thus did she often appear to Montague's fancy in the after days—with a glory round her, and an awful darkness on herself. And it tortured the man—yet he bore it in silence.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN due course a suitable school was found for Catherine, where she lived with girls of good breeding, and attended lectures.

Mrs Eliot missed her sorely. But the girl went doggedly to work ; and if sometimes the loneliness of her position came home to her, she drove it from her, and pressed the more closely to her work.

When the term closed Mrs Eliot expected Catherine to return for the holidays. But she remained in town.

"I'm not coming back," she wrote in her firm clear hand, "till I can keep myself from talking Devon when I'm startled. Here I hear none of it, and that gives me a chance. Sometimes I want to come back so, I can hardly keep myself. But I can wait."

When the summer vacation came round the following year, Cathie came back to Upcott and stayed with Mrs Eliot in the little cottage Madge had once rented, overlooking the Teel.

Now, although Lady Gamble had promised to

give Catherine a helping hand as soon as she could talk "plain English," as she expressed it, she by no means intended that her nephew should assist her in the task.

The position of affairs after Cathie returned was self-evident. Lady Gamble herself saw them walking together in the Upcott woods—and what more do you want for proof?

She said not a word to her nephew, but the first thing the following day she ordered her carriage and drove to Upcott. Arrived there, she requested to see Cathie privately.

Lady Gamble stood up as the girl entered, regarding her haughtily.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Unprincipled girl, trying to engage the affection of my nephew! How dare you!"

"I dare do all that may become a woman. Who dares do more is none!" replied Cathie, who had been called away from Shakespeare.

"How dare you quote Milton to me, when I am seriously in earnest!" cried Lady Gamble. "It is nothing in the world but bold-faced impertinence!"

"When you have finished misnaming quotations may I go?" inquired Cathie.

"You may do nothing of the sort. I have come here to extract, or, if necessary, bribe you to a promise that you will no longer seek to entangle my poor nephew."

"I suppose," she said, "it's the right of every woman to try and make the man she loves return her affection?"

"Oh, the boldness!" cried Lady Gamble.

"So," continued Catherine, "if I loved him, I should see no harm whatever in trying to make him love me. But, after all," turning with a smile to Lady Gamble, "this is entirely beside the question, because I don't love him, so why waste time over abstruse questions?"

Lady Gamble gasped.

"You lie!" she cried, exasperated beyond herself.

"I don't care what your title or position," began Cathie. "However, we're degenerating into vulgar personalities. Your nephew is nothing to me, and if I am something to him, I have nothing to gain by it."

"You have all to gain by it!" said Lady Gamble, quivering with passion. "You mean to marry him, and you cannot deceive me!"

"Since your ladyship knows best," said Catherine, "I will not contradict you."

"Ah! You confess to it?"

"Isn't the asking of questions a little superfluous?"

"Oh, my dear girl!" cried Lady Gamble, feeling she had begun on the wrong tack, "do not let us be absurd with each other. Let us come to an understanding. Have you set your heart upon him?"

"Certainly not!" said Cathie, indignantly.

"May I believe you? Oh, surely I may! My poor Cyril! It would be too appalling!"

"It would, indeed," said Cathie, demurely.

"I believe we understand each other,—I believe I can trust you."

"I believe you can."

"I believe it is only the poor misguided boy."

"I believe it is."

"My dear, can you forgive me?"

"I believe I can."

"It would be so dreadful!"

"Oh, it would!" said Cathie, quite shocked.

"In this neighbourhood, I mean."

"To be sure."

"I believe you are a good, honest, sweet girl!"

"Since I don't love Mr Wain—to be sure I am. And precisely the reverse if I did!"

"My dear," cried Lady Gamble, delightedly, "tell me, now, who *are* your parents?"

"Mr and Mrs Tythycott. Of origin unknown, but doubtless honest."

Lady Gamble **threw up her hands.**

"Oh, you're delightful!" she cried. "Only promise you'll never speak of this to a soul."

"Never!" answered Catherine.

Lady Gamble came in late for luncheon. Cyril was waiting for her in the library, and wondering how soon after lunch he might venture to call at the schoolhouse.

"My dear," she cried, gleefully, drawing off her gloves, "I have proposed for you, and you've been refused."

"Been refused! Where? How do you mean?" cried Cyril, turning into pink and white patches.

"Why, to that girl—you know! And she won't have you—won't have you. *Won't* have you—not at any price!"

"But how did you know? I mean, what business—I beg your pardon; but surely it was my place to propose?"

"My dear, it's anybody's place who can get in first. Besides, never mind whose place it was—you're saved."

"She did not like the idea?" said Cyril, trying to control his voice.

"Like it! She positively ridiculed it," replied his aunt, determining not to notice his agitation. "Oh, how thankful I was! I could have kissed her. What a poor foolish boy you were! By the way, I hope I was right. I hope she spoke the truth, and really doesn't care for you," she finished, her face falling.

"There's not a doubt of that," said Cyril, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece and his head in his hand, and looking like a very bad sailor crossing a very rough sea.

"Ah, that's right! Now come in to lunch. It's all waiting."

"I don't care for any lunch," said Cyril. "I've—I've an engagement."

"Have you? Well, I'm ravenous."

As she rose from a hearty meal she said to herself—

"Poor boy! I daresay he feels it, though I was really so delighted myself that his view of the case never struck me. Well, well, we all get our fingers burnt more or less. Who's to say I didn't in my young days?"

CHAPTER LXV.

THE master's bell rang violently. Pringwood answered it in haste.

"Turn her out!" Lord Frobisher cried, as soon as the old man appeared.

The old man looked round the room, in which evening had now cast dismal shadows.

"Turn her out!" repeated his master. "She stands beside you. God in heaven, man, don't you see her?"

The old servant blinked, and into his heart sorrow entered.

Forty years had he served Lord Frobisher, and never once, severe as the strain had often been, had he known his powerful mind to wander.

"Ees, sir!" he said; and he made a pretence of carrying out the order.

Lord Frobisher lay back on his pillows and began muttering to himself—

"I always knew she'd come. I always felt it.

All my life long I've had this before me. Now my peace of mind has gone for ever. She has come, she has come!"

Repeating the last words over to himself again and again in accents of despair, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER LXVI.

TEMPLE'S wedding-day was drawing near. Lord Frobisher had been failing much of late, and Mrs Clavers decided that the marriage might now take place without any indiscretion.

The burden of the thought to Temple was almost intolerable. Still he faced it; but the cruellest part of it all to him was, that he had made *her* to suffer. Yes, he was man enough to know he had treated her cruelly, and to suffer the pangs of bitter remorse in consequence.

"What are you thinking of?" Elsie said one day when they were together. "Oh, such serious thoughts!"

"Oh, nothing!" he said, trying to speak lightly.

"But they must have been about *something*, dear," said Elsie, with the air of a person who has made a shrewd observation.

"Well, nothing that would interest you at any rate," said Temple, smiling with an effort.

"But everything that interests you interests me," she answered with tender affection.

He got up abruptly.

"This wouldn't any way," he said with cheerful decision. "Take my word for it. Shall we stroll out? It's so close indoors."

She linked her arm through his.

"I don't want to know anything you would rather not tell me, dear," she said, gently. "Always remember that. You are free—absolutely free—always. A woman when she loves, you know, is just a well—ever so deep—you can't get to the bottom of it. And she holds all the man she loves gives her to hold, and doesn't grumble a bit even if it only comes half way up."

Temple cleared his throat.

"And a man isn't a bit like that," he answered, still attempting to speak lightly; "he is like a cataract. He wants to tear up everything before him, and sometimes he tears up the wr——" He stopped abruptly. "The woman has hard work to keep pace with him," he finished, putting his arm round her; "and very often when she does there's no satisfaction in it."

"No satisfaction for the man do you mean?"

"No, no; of course not—for the woman."

"If you think that, you can't understand love a bit."

"I understand it only too well," he answered, abruptly. "It is the most maddening, sweetly intoxicating, impossible thing in the world!"

She looked at him with wide open eyes.

"How different men and women are!" she said. "Isn't it funny they should get on together?"

"Oh, some women are very like men," he said. "That is the perfection of a union—where they are alike enough to understand each other, and yet so different that they are a perpetual tonic to each other."

Elsie gave a little sigh.

"Don't let us be metaphysical," she said. "Don't let us analyse love."

"No; you are quite right—we won't."

"How about that girl Cathie?" asked Elsie, after a pause.

"Oh, Cathie," said Temple, as if he had suddenly remembered her. "I'm sure I don't know." Then, not quite liking to tell a lie to the woman who was to be his wife—for Temple had not yet quite reached the number who think wives are the very women one has to lie to—he checked himself. "At least, yes, by the way. I saw her once after I came back."

All his nerves tingled at the recollection. The very sound of her name turned him giddy.

"Is she still anxious to learn?"

Elsie had to repeat the question before he heard.

"I believe so. I only saw her accidentally."

"You know I never believed in her; her learning was merely a ruse. Isn't she grateful for all you did for her?"

"I don't know," said Temple. The unconscious

irony of the question affected him strongly. His voice shook. He turned aside on the pretence of lighting his pipe.

"Are you laughing about it?" asked Elsie, trying to see his face. "I have often. She was such a barefaced fraud."

"Laughing! God, no!" cried Temple, flinging the pipe from him in a moment of unconquerable passion: then facing her—"Never mention her name to me again! It was a mistake—a bitter one—from first to last!"

"What, she turned out badly? Well, you remember, dear, my impression of her?"

"Perfectly."

"And I was right?"

"I tell you I know nothing whatever of her, nor do I wish to. She has gone from the farm—that is all I can tell you."

Many and many a time had he climbed the slope in vain.

"Well, I'm glad she's gone, any way," said Elsie; "I do hate impostors."

CHAPTER LXVII.

EARLY in the following spring Temple was summoned to Upcott suddenly. Lord Frobisher had been gradually declining in strength, and the end was thought to be not far off.

"I shall never live in this cursed place," said Temple, as he wandered aimlessly about the grounds, trying to keep his eyes from straying across to the old farmhouse.

Within, the dying master raised himself on his elbow and called to his servant.

"Pringwood," he said, hoarsely, "she's here again. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Bear it, my lord," said the old servant—"bear it like a man. She can't harm you."

"But I harmed her! I harmed her!" he groaned, falling back upon his pillow. "I need not have: that is what always hits so hard—I need not have. And yet I had the greater right to the greater part. What was she but an interloper? What was he but that? What right had he to marry, with one foot in the grave?"

He glared angrily at the old butler as he asked the question.

"None, sir—none!" the old man answered.

"It seemed such a simple thing to do," continued the quavering voice. "It was put in my way! It was an unfair temptation! She was ill in bed; it was so simple to send the infected letter; how was I to know for certain she'd catch it? She died; she might have died any way. But it was the will that killed me. Curse them for that will! Half his fortune. Damn his liberality! And now the whole county will know. My name will stink. Can I get out of it, Pringwood? No? What a liar and a betrayer you have been to me! But you think—you think—well, if there is a God, you think, do you, He'll accept this restitution? I shall be acknowledging my sin, shan't I? confess your sins, doesn't it say somewhere? God, this horrible darkness! And in the flashes of light *she* comes! Curse the Scotch blood that ran in my grandmother's veins! what a hell's life it's given me!"

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Cathie, before she could go back to London, found it would be necessary to call at Lord Frobisher's for a little more ready money. She had been often—and she had never been in vain.

She waited until Mrs Eliot had gone out to her choir practice; then she went upstairs, and opened the oak chest she had brought with her from 'Postle Farm. She took from it the old

brown torn frock she had worn at her work on the farm in the days when Temple had first known her. She pinned it carefully where the buttons had come off, and throwing an old shawl over her head—the same she had thrown off the night she startled Miss Scottie with her beauty—she stole softly down the garden path.

The night was dark, and at the cross roads she hesitated.

"It's like as if I were afraid," she murmured. "What is there to be afraid of? It's the conventional London life and the crowds have made me afraid of my own shadow."

She walked on for some distance rapidly. As she passed the public-house the light from the window fell on her face, and a man sitting within saw it. Drinking his whisky at a draught, he threw down his coppers in payment and hurried out.

"Theer 'er goes now," said Miah; "'er as can dress like the betterment volk, a-clotheyed in rags an' tatters! 'Er be crazed! Wull, I knowed it all along. I'll 'ave my eye on 'er, zee if I don't. If I could catch 'er out in's dark an' skeer 'er, or catch 'er keepin' company an' tell on 'er an' mak' 'er tell me wheer 'er gets 'er money from! My, if I only could! But 'er be that slipperified."

Once Cathie thought she heard a step behind her, and she paused; but all was silent.

"I am positively trembling," she cried to herself. "This is no ordinary nerves. There is

something behind. What am I to do? I can't take anybody with me, because no one must know. There's one man would never tell." She hesitated. "But I can't go to he. I'll go another night; perhaps I won't feel like this then."

So she turned back by the field way, and Miah missed her. It was not destined that this ruffian should ever harm her.

The next night Catherine started on the same errand. Two miles quick walking brought her to her destination. She rang the bell three times. These were Pringwood's instructions to her. She was to ring the bell three times, and then hide in the bushes until he came out to her. Sometimes Catherine revolted against this—but the money was useful. How could she learn without it?

Catherine rang, and then she waited. So long was the old man-servant in coming, she was on the point of ringing again when the door opened and the lamp-light streamed out and glistened on the laurels.

Then the old man came out with his shuffling step, and Catherine came forward to meet him.

"Lord Frobisher's dead," he said, brokenly.

"Ah! you are sorry," said Catherine in quick sympathy. "You loved him."

"I loved un," the old man said in a voice that trembled. "I be sorry; there ain't no money this time. But keep heart in 'ee, missy."

"Yes," said Cathie; "I will." Though the disappointment was a sore one, she spoke with her usual courage. "And you keep cheerful, too."

She held out her hand to him.

"You've always been kind to me since the day you came to market with Grandfer and bought me chocolates."

The old man sobbed. He grasped her hand again and again, and raised it to his lips as he murmured brokenly—

"God bless 'ee, God bless 'ee! An' tak' 'eart, missy, tak' 'eart! An', missy, remember I did things always the bes' way I could. I loved 'is lordship, I loved un!"

And Catherine turned and walked back the way she had come, but her tears were falling. There was nothing left now but poor Grandfer's hard-earned savings.

So absorbed was she in settling her plans for the future, that she re-entered the house without taking any precautions to avoid discovery.

Instantly Mrs Eliot heard her unguarded footstep and called from within—

"Some one wishes to speak to you, dear."

And Catherine, with a strange tremor at her heart, pushed open the door and stood face to face—in her ragged gown and her faded shawl—with Temple.

"Cathie!" he cried, springing towards her, while Mrs Eliot started to her feet with a movement

of uncontrollable surprise. A strange drama was unrolling before her. "Cathie," he said again, speaking with strong agitation, but still controlling himself, "I am disinherited! The money and the land are yours!"

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"I DON'T understand," said Elsie, slowly.

"It is plain enough," said Mrs Clavers. "He is disinherited."

"Yes," repeated Temple, dully; "I am disinherited."

"But why?"

"He has left his money to the rightful heiress."

"He has left his money to a peasant-girl, you say?"

"No, he has left it to his niece—his brother's only child—Catherine Frobisher!"

"You have been deceiving us all this while!" cried Mrs Clavers. "You must have known you could never inherit the property!"

"If it is your direct intention to insult me," said Temple, "the conversation can end."

Elsie threw herself upon his breast.

"Oh, do not listen to her!" she cried. "Do not quarrel! Money does not matter!"

"Let us understand it thoroughly," said Mrs Clavers. "Who is this girl? Where has she been all the time?"

"It was a case of foul play, and the old man called in a lawyer and made a confession on the last day of his life. He wished it to be known his brother's wife died through his design. He sent her an infected letter, and she took scarlet fever and died. His brother's child was given to his old man-servant to take to a convent, from whence, after a while, her fictitious death was reported. The old servant, however, suspicious of foul play, or probably a repentant accomplice—only, of course, Lord Frobisher would not inculcate him, and he has got off scot-free—anyway he didn't take her to France—he took her to one of Lord Frobisher's tenants, a cousin of his own, persuading him to give it out that the child was his granddaughter. He had a daughter who married a sailor, and they hatched up a story between them that the child was hers. She was brought up roughly on the farm. No one suspected her birth—but the two old men could not rest about it. It seemed terrible to them, I suppose, to doom the child to a rough life, when the blood of the Frobishers ran in her veins. Anyhow, they wrote to Lord Frobisher—or rather the old man at the farm did—and threatened to disclose everything unless Lord Frobisher provided the girl with money during his lifetime, and with his fortune when he died. And they left a statement of her birth in the hands of the family lawyer—but Lord Frobisher himself confessed it—so the girl has inherited all, and I—am penniless, except

for two hundred a-year, besides my own small fortune."

"Then did the girl know too?"

"The girl knew nothing."

"But how can this be proved?"

"There is no one to dispute it."

"What! You have not the courage!"

"I have no doubt! The girl has in her possession one of the Frobisher heirlooms. It seems it was tied round her neck as a child, and she lost it, but she has found it since on the banks of the river Teel."

For a moment Mrs Clavers was silent.

"You will understand, Elsie, I cannot let you marry a penniless adventurer!" she said at last; and with these words she left the room. She was bitterly humiliated at the turn things had taken.

Temple stood on the hearthrug looking straight before him and frowning. He was thrusting the thought of Catherine away from him.

Elsie stood timidly regarding him. Her bosom rose and fell rapidly; her lips were parted. She wanted him so to turn to her, crying, "What is poverty to love? Only stand by me!"

But he did not say it. He stood pale, with his lips compressed. All his energy was concentrated on the one supreme effort of keeping Catherine from his thoughts. To think of her would mean a madness—a fury; and the time was not yet.

Elsie tried to read his face. Was it possible he

was hurt because she did not speak, believing her silence was because she agreed with all her mother had said, and not because the beating of her heart was so passionate she dared not break the silence lest she should say more than was fitting?

Yes! he was hurt because she did not offer herself, though surely—surely he must know. The next moment she had sprung to his side, and was sobbing on his breast.

"Oh, don't doubt me, darling! You know no future is possible to me without you!"

Mechanically he put his arms round her.

"Have you thought what poverty means?"

"I can bear it,—I can bear anything!"

"But your mother!—she will never consent."

"I do not care! I will not give you up!"

"I cannot ask you to do so much for me."

"Oh, dearest! you know love counts all as nothing!"

He could urge nothing further.

"It is very brave of you," he said, lamely.

"Would you not do the same for me?" she whispered.

"I would do anything for the girl I loved!" he cried with sudden passion. "What would I not do?"

He had turned from her abruptly, and was pacing the room.

"Oh, what have I done to deserve such love!" she sobbed.

He started. For the moment he had forgotten Elsie.

"Elsie, I cannot take you into grinding poverty!" he exclaimed. "Even if I——" He stopped short.

"Even if you didn't love me. Ah, but you do; and you couldn't be so cruel to me—or to yourself. I will make you such a good wife,—I will be so careful. I shall not care where I live, dear, or how hard I work, as long as I have you! You were hurt—just at first—because I did not speak. But oh! it wasn't want of love, dear, that kept me silent."

She finished brokenly.

He was fain to take her hands and press them between his own.

"We belong to each other, dear, ever since that day long ago when you came across the lawn to meet me. You are so noble and so good, you want to spare me all poverty and pain. But oh! these are nothing to me, so long as I have you!"

He bowed his head in silence, and took the blow that love had dealt him.

He must be good and true to her. Cathie had bidden him. He must follow in her footsteps, which were led by a heart so much nobler than his own.

CHAPTER LXIX.

CATHERINE FROBISHER entered the home that had come to her by right of descent.

In the first mad excitement of the neighbourhood, when stories even less desirable than the truth were being bandied from mouth to mouth, and even well-bred society forgot itself, Catherine had deemed it advisable to move quietly away until the first furore over her history had somewhat subsided.

She went to London and spent a year in hard work, giving the finishing touches to an education the foundation of which had already been firmly laid.

Then she came back to the walls that had sheltered her ancestors for many a generation, and to the portraits, of whom the originals had helped each one to build her to the perfection of womanhood. The last of her name, she seemed to have gathered all that was most worthy of perpetuation in her progenitors, and she stood the incarnation of all that a noble race should be.

From this old admiral she gained her courage and unflinching purpose, and from this gentle-eyed lady the womanly heart of pity; from another her love of truth; from a fourth her inward vision—step after step, line upon line. Of what service is long ancestry, if it has not perpetuated truth and virtue?

The people of the neighbourhood streamed in to call—for, even in this nineteenth century, what wins the heart like romance?

And Lady Gamble said—

"My dear, I was very foolish to speak to you as I did about Cyril. It was very queer of me, too; for I always declared you had good blood in your veins—only, unfortunately, our good blood doesn't always run in legitimate channels."

One morning Catherine came down to breakfast, to find among her letters a handwriting that she knew. She turned a little pale, and laid it aside to read later.

Her companion—an elderly, inoffensive person—sat at the head of the table serving coffee from a silver urn.

Catherine pushed her letter a little farther away with a determined action, as if she were brushing the memory of the writer from her mind. She set herself to contemplate the schemes for the improvement of her cottages and land that had been laid before her on the previous day.

But after all, such things to a young and beautiful woman, however enthusiastic she may be, are but as the dry dust compared to the full tide of nature's design. For nature's design, from the beginning of all things, was something more than this, and the normal woman knows it.

Yet the other thought that pressed itself upon her, Catherine would not have. To keep her thoughts from wandering back to it, she began expressing them aloud. The poor lady at the end of the table cleared her throat nervously, and nodded and murmured, trying at least to appear as though she kept pace with the active brain of her companion.

"I am glad," Catherine said, in that beautiful voice of hers that had caught the heart of Temple when it rolled out its wild Devonshire to him—"I am glad I lived with the people for seventeen years of my life. Now I shall understand them as I never could have without it. After all, they are the true philosophers. The nothingness of life, its brevity, its merely prefatory character, is understood by them in a way our class never can understand. 'Unto the poor,'—some religious people patter out sentences that seem to point to understanding, but they don't understand, really. They only repeat like parrots. Unto the poor only is the full meaning of the gospel realised, and the gospel is—Philosophy."

There was silence. The bright February sun-

shine flashed on the white cloth and massive silver ; a canary burst into sudden song ; the sunlight dulled the fire, and the embers fell together with a hollow sound.

Catherine looked slowly round upon it all. The portraits on the wall, the handsome bronze ornaments, the rich carpet, the heavy curtains, the luxurious chairs,—all hers.

Then her eye wandered through the window, on to the old grey farm standing half-way up the grassy hillside. That was hers too. Once it had been hers in quite a different way—part of her life ; the breath she drew.

On its scanty uplands her heart had learnt to love. And she wished it might come back to her—the beauty of those summer days.

Then Catherine broke the seal of her letter and read it. It ran :—

“Ever since we parted I have been in South Africa. Elsie would not marry me until she had her mother’s consent, and I daresay you know already Mrs Clavers is now dead. I wrote home asking Elsie to join me here, but her answer was she could not leave her father now that he was alone, and she set me *free*. Surely even your sense of honour will not affirm that I am not? I have tried to persuade Elsie, and have offered her father a home out here, but he says he is too old now to travel so far. Surely there is no man living who, under these circumstances, would hold him-

self bound still! If you do not want me to call and see you, write me by return. But, Cathie, it is not possible you have forgotten our past!"

There had been no Sunday delivery, and it was now too late to write, even had she wished to.

She sat, trying to realise it all; but it seemed like some far-off dream,—something, perhaps, that had happened to her in another world. She felt as if nothing could ever awaken her feelings and emotions again; and very restlessly she passed the day, starting at every sound.

They stood together in the great silent library, where but lately the dead man had stood trying to simulate the strength and gladness of his youth.

She was very pale. Dark rings were under her eyes. She had thought the supreme moment of her life would be so different to this.

"What is all this to me—the riches, the position?" she said at last, speaking in a low, agitated whisper. "What are they to me? Nothing, and worse than nothing—weights about my neck! Oh!" she cried, passionately, "wouldn't I rather be on the grassy hillside now, with you free to love me honourably." She sank into a chair. She had never felt such utter despair. "When you were free," she finished, in a dull, passionless voice, "you could not love me honourably."

"Cathie!" he cried, "I have so often wanted to

explain all that time to you. I loved you so much——"

"So little, you mean," she said, looking at him with eyes that glowed in her white face. "Could you have loved me so much—so very much, and have banished me from your side, while you enjoyed all this splendour?"

She stamped her foot on the carpet, thinking of the bare floors at 'Postle Farm. It echoed dully.

"Could a woman do so? Never! When a woman loves, any sacrifice is not too great. She scorns the world. That is never love which is not the strongest emotion of the heart, saving the fear of God. Have you thought," she cried, speaking in a low, impassioned voice, "what you would have brought on me? Have you considered what my position to-day would have been? A Frobisher—this estate mine—myself scouted by the county, and even the country-folk I lived and worked amongst pointing at me the finger of shame and scorn! Have you thought? Oh! have you thought?"

Her hands were clasped, her dark eyes were glowing into his, and her beautiful face was pale as death.

"And you say you loved me! Ah! that was never, never love!"

She rose from her chair. A long, shuddering

sigh burst from her. She pressed her hand to her heart.

Trembling from head to foot, she continued in quick, agitated, broken tones—

"I have thought of it all day. It haunts me—I can't get away from it. The abyss at my feet—the awful chasm! I hear the gravel and the earth and the shells patter down, down! These are my hopes, my ambitions, my future possibilities, my honour, my love!"

He was white to the lips. He staggered from his chair.

"You no longer love me, then?" he said, in a hollow voice.

She looked upwards at him—a long, yearning look that stabbed him.

"If our positions were altered——" he began.

"My position as a woman and yours as a man have never altered," she answered. "I am no more a woman to-day than I was as I ran along the hillside to meet you in my coarse clothes and the stains of honest labour on my hands. Our positions have not altered; but the vulgarity of our minds is so great—yours and mine—that we have never grasped the significance of those positions till they were painted for us in these broad lines of light and shade. Is that not so?"

She looked at him for a long moment. He

had no answer to give. She turned again wearily and dropped her face upon her arm.

"Can't you forgive me, Cathie?" he said, in a voice of strong emotion.

He placed his hand over hers that lay listlessly on the polished table.

"I am not blaming you," she said, very gently. "I am only looking back and facing it all. Could you have loved me then, how different our positions to-day! And if I had been like some poor girls, how awful—oh, how awful!—my condition to-day! That is all. It only comes to us once in a lifetime, perhaps, to see things as they are in all their luridness—in all their horrid possibilities. Forgive me for paining you!"

She put out a hand half timid, half imploring.

"You once said that—there was no forgiveness in love."

"In love—no—I spoke the truth."

"But you cannot forgive me now?"

She was silent a moment, then—

"I have forgiven you—and—forgotten!"

There was absolute stillness. Only the wild beating of two hearts—the one that took the pain, the one that gave it.

"Is there no particle of hope for me?" he cried at last; and he caught her wrists and tried to force her hands from her face.

With all the effort of her strong will she raised her head, and her despairing eyes looked into

his. And he read his answer in them, for they were the tomb of love.

A minute later the heavy hall-door swung to behind him, closing the one and only chapter in his life that was written at once with the dust of hell and with the fire of heaven.

THE END.